

SEEDBED

PRACTITIONERS IN CONVERSATION

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Assessing Arabic Translations of Scripture & Using Arabic in Ministry

EDITORIAL: Ministering to Muslims in an Arabic context	3
LETTER TO THE EDITOR	4
PART 1: ASSESSING ARABIC TRANSLATIONS OF THE SCRIPTURES	
Modern Arabic translations & their witness to Christ <i>by Basheer Abdulfadi</i>	7
Choosing an Arabic Bible <i>by Tim & Sharon Warner</i>	21
Initial response to reading <i>The Meaning of the Gospel of Christ</i> <i>by Phillip Drapper</i>	33
PART 2: EXPATRIATE WORKERS LEARNING AND WORKING WITH ARABIC	
Optimal Language Learning: Learning from those who have done it <i>by SB</i>	36
Learning Arabic Effectively	
Tips from a trainer of Arabic teachers <i>by SR</i>	44
Tips from an Arabic programme director <i>by SH</i>	46
Arabic - A Love Language for People in the Gulf <i>by multiple authors</i>	48
Response 1: English can work! <i>By Abu Bill</i>	54
Response 2: Learning Arabic gives opportunity to bless <i>by Daniel & Maria</i>	57
Ministry Language in the UK Diaspora <i>by HJ</i>	59
PART 3: BETTER UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNICATING WITH MUSLIMS	
A Muslim-Christian Dialogue on the Role of Works in Salvation <i>by Dale Martin</i>	62
A Sunni Woman's Heart - Part 2: A Need to Belong <i>by Tahira</i>	65
PART 4: BOOK REVIEWS	
<i>The Messenger, the Message, and the Community</i> <i>by Roland Muller</i>	72
<i>Grace for Muslims</i> <i>by Steve Bell</i>	75
<i>Surprised by Hope</i> <i>by N. T. Wright</i>	76
You can be a part of the ongoing Seedbed conversation	79

SEEDBED

Practitioners in Conversation

Editor: Don Little
Copy Editor & Typesetter: Sandra Dick
Proofreader: Beverly Laugesen

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USA: AWM, Seedbed, PO Box 96, Upper Darby PA 19082
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EDITORIAL

MINISTERING TO MUSLIMS IN AN ARABIC CONTEXT

In this issue of **Seedbed**, we focus on the themes of the scriptures in Arabic, learning Arabic and ministering in Arabic. Though many of us who live in the Arab world usually function in Arabic in our relationships with those around us, few of us have sufficient fluency in Arabic to be able to assess the translations we use. We also face significant challenges in ministering in Arabic, and in learning Arabic and continuing to improve our fluency. This issue will help us with in all three areas.

In Part 1, three articles examine the primary translations of the Scriptures into Arabic that are available today. Abdulfadi assesses how well four translations render key passages that point to and teach the divinity of Christ. The Warners assess how well native Arabic-speakers *understand* selected passages in the different translations of the Arabic scriptures. Part 1 concludes with Drapper's initial assessment of *The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ*, which was published in June and has already become quite controversial.

Part 2 contains a number of articles related both to foreigners learning to speak and minister in Arabic and to the value of ministering in Arabic. Together, I believe that they will provide insight and much practical help for everyone living and working in the Arab world.

In Part 3, Martin shares some helpful insights into how we can explain to Muslims the nature of the Christian life – one that is lived by faith through grace. Then we have the second in our series in which Tahira shares helpful insights into how a few Sunni women think and feel about being Muslims. Finally, in Part 4, are three book reviews. The first two provide much practical help in our ministries, and the third encourages us to reflect afresh on our understanding of the Gospel and of our future with God.

Your response to any **Seedbed** article is always welcome, and I will publish the best ones in order to encourage our conversation together. The only letter received in response to the last issue of **Seedbed** is quite critical of its generally positive treatment of *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road* and voices concerns that many have felt about Chandler's book that were *not addressed* in the last issue of **Seedbed**.

On behalf of all who read and benefit from **Seedbed**, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to Sandra Dick who has served as **Seedbed** copy and layout editor for more than five years. Her other increasing responsibilities have meant that this will be her last issue of **Seedbed**.

Don Little, Editor
editor.seedbed@wornet.org

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

September 4, 2008

Dear Don,

I am a minister to and among Muslims, serving with the Assemblies of God in the US. This past July I read the book, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road* by Paul-Gordon Chandler, as well as the *Seedbed* articles (2008, Vol. 22, No 1) concerning this book and Mazhar Mallouhi's life. It is an understatement to say that I was shocked by Chandler and Mallouhi as well as very disappointed with *Seedbed's* treatment of the book.

You are aware of this as I sent you my 5-page book review (http://answering-islam.org/Reviews/chandler_mallouhi.html). I also sent it to Greg Livingstone, Phil Linton, Brad Gill (all of whom wrote in the last issue) and others. I know all three of these men and also met Mallouhi several years ago when he was visiting the local area. Everything that I was told about him was positive, and that heightened my surprise at the book's content. To read various statements made by both Chandler and Mallouhi that smack of compromise, syncretism, relativism and universalism was disturbing enough; to then read the positive reviews in *Seedbed* that appeared to sidestep these issues or qualify them was too much to allow anyone who cares about the inspiration of the Bible to remain silent.

I also have a compelling personal reason to speak out as I am a research assistant for Greg Livingstone, Mazhar's lifelong friend. It is because of both my working and personal relationship with Greg that I bought the book, read it completely, took extensive notes, wrote my review and now this letter. As members of the same body, we have a responsibility to hold one another accountable and I feel that this responsibility has been forsaken for the sake of individual friendships and past positive experiences with Mallouhi.

Since some feel that I am being too exacting of Mallouhi, I quote him:

When I hear the Psalms read, for example in church, and when it says 'The God of Israel,' I find this a stumbling block for me, because this presents a tribal God (p. 181).

I cannot reconcile God ordering massacres in the Old Testament (p. 181).

We are part of several groups of Muslim mystics, Sufis; sometimes we meet in our home, other times in theirs. But we walk together this spiritual journey toward God (p. 193).

I have met many Muslims who I believe are farther spiritually than me, and a million miles closer to God, loving God and devoted to God with complete sincerity (p. 193).

‘If people do not have the revelation of God in Christ, this of course does not mean that they do not know God,’ says Mazhar (p. 91).

‘I believe Gandhi loved Christ but could not afford to be publicly associated with “Christianity” –being a Hindu by allegiance, but a Christ follower by affinity. And I fully expect to see Gandhi when we are privileged to enter God’s presence in eternity’ (p. 123).

Mallouhi: ‘It is very hard for me to picture God, whom I love, and whom I know loves humanity, his creation, sending anyone to an eternal hell. God is just. And if he treats evil with evil then what difference is there between him and us’ (p. 198).

I am deeply concerned ***about the spiritual harm that these clearly anti-biblical statements can result in***, whether through (or in) gospel workers, former Muslims or Muslims close to the Kingdom. Mallouhi has a responsibility, first and foremost to God, to genuinely repent and to prove that repentance by doing whatever he can to publicly recant and disavow these beliefs. I suggest that he write another book addressing his anti-biblical statements, in which he ***clearly shows that his beliefs are in line with biblical orthodoxy***. I further urge him to ***include an apology for the confusion and compromise that this has caused*** and has the potential to continue to cause.

If I made these statements ***and held to them***, I would be dismissed as a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and no evangelical organization would accept me – much less allow me to remain within it. If, in our

attempts to be relevant and fruitful in ministry to Muslims, we can dismiss and/or ignore blatant heresy (and not demand actions worthy of repentance – see Matthew 3:8), we become like the proverbial frog in a pot of boiling water, being boiled to death while sensing no danger. C.S. Lewis, ‘one of Mazhar’s favourite Western writers’ (p. 146), said:

As Christians we are tempted to make unnecessary concessions to those outside the faith. We give in too much. Now, I don’t mean that we should run the risk of making a nuisance of ourselves by witnessing at improper times, but there comes a time when we must show that we disagree. We must show our Christian colours, if we are to be true to Jesus Christ. We cannot remain silent or concede everything away.*

While confrontation can be perceived as not having the other person’s or party’s best interest at heart, it really is my desire that Mallouhi and Chandler be all that God wants them to be. And this can only happen as they live and ‘teach what is in accord with sound doctrine’ (Titus 2:1).

May all of us ‘in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ’ (Eph. 4:15).

Sincerely,

Adam Simnowitz

P.S. I have been in contact with Mazhar Mallouhi, Greg Livingstone, Phil Linton and Brad Gill.

*(http://www.cbn.com/special/Narnia/articles/ans_LewisLastInterviewA.aspx)

PART I: ASSESSING ARABIC TRANSLATIONS OF THE SCRIPTURES

Modern Arabic Translations and Their Witness to Christ

By Basheer Abdulfadi

Basheer Abdulfadi and his family live in the Arabian Peninsula. He is a western tentmaker who has worked for 15 years in the Arab World in evangelism, discipleship, and training of leaders.

Summary

The proliferation of Arabic translations of the Bible is a cause of both rejoicing and controversy. Most discussion about the relative merits of the four commonly available translations has more of the spirit of cheerleading than of objectivity. This article compares the translation of passages from the Old and New Testaments that have direct bearing on the deity of Christ. All four translations have some weaknesses in this area. The newest translation introduces variants for some of the titles of Christ, and these can cloud the witness to his deity. The comparison that follows is, therefore, intended to help evangelists and church planters choose a translation and to bear witness to the deity of Christ.

I. Introduction

The increasing number of Arabic translations of the Bible indicates the renewed energy of evangelicals to reach the Muslim world with the Gospel. In contrast to the situation before 1865, when missionaries had to contend with seriously deficient translations,¹ today's field workers now have recourse to the Smith–Van Dyck–Al-Bustani (SVDB) translation published in 1865, the *Kitaab Al-Hay-*

yaah (KH) translation published in 1988 (sometimes called the *New Arabic Bible*), the *Today's Arabic Version* (TAV) published in 1993 (sometimes known as the *Good News Arabic Bible*), and the *Al-Kitaab Al-Shariif* (KS) translation published in 2000.² But with the availability of so many translations, there will inevitably be controversy over the choice.³

1 J.A. Thompson, *The Bible Translator*, 6, 51-55; 98-106 (1955).

2 I used a copy of the KS from the 2003 printing. The KS apparently has undergone a number of revisions.

3 In July of 2008 a new translation of the Gospels and Acts was announced. It is not included in the comparison.

Choosing a translation requires a process of evaluation. One way to evaluate the translations for use is to consider the difficulty and ‘Christian-ness’ of the vocabulary.⁴ By ‘difficulty’ is meant the degree to which the words used are unfamiliar to the average reader. The other dimension, ‘Christian-ness’, measures how unique certain theological phrases are to those of Christian background. So, for those who feel that simpler language is better and who prefer to use neutral or Muslim terms instead of theological ones used primarily by Christians, the SVDB, which uses high Arabic and Christian theological vocabulary, is not a good choice. The KH uses simpler, but similarly Christian-specific vocabulary, while the TAV uses simple Arabic but makes an effort to choose neutral or Muslim words. The KS also uses simple vocabulary and grammar while using Muslim terminology.

The difficult-simple dimension is important when considering the state of literacy of the target audience. In general, it is safe to say that most field workers prefer simple over difficult

vocabulary and constructions. However, the choice along the Christian-Muslim terminology dimension is often driven more by ideology than by utility. The church planter needs criteria that are related to task. Of the myriad of choices made by translators, which issues have the greatest implications for evangelism, discipleship and the establishment of local churches?

I propose here to consider the various translations on the basis of their clarity in communicating the deity of Christ. Comparisons have not previously been made on this dimension, which is of the greatest importance for every stage of church planting. The other dimensions are very important and they cross-cut with the communication of Christ’s deity. But the Bible’s witness to the deity of Christ is so central to conversion, life in Christ and worship that it deserves special consideration apart from these other important issues.⁵

The approach is to review the main passages in both the Old and New Testaments that bear witness to the deity of Christ, and consider care-

4 See the excellent chapter ‘Qur’anic Arabic and the Protestant Arabic Bible’ in Sam Schlorff’s book, *Missiological Models in Ministry to Muslims*, Middle East Resources, 2006.

5 In Rick Brown’s article ‘What Must One Believe about Jesus for Salvation’ (2000), he summarizes saving faith as the belief that Jesus is Saviour and Lord, and concludes that belief in substitutionary atonement or the deity of Christ is not a requirement for saving faith. I agree with Brown that many people have added requirements to the Gospel, and that we cannot expect a newly converted person to have all the details worked out at the time of conversion. However, the Bible does not leave the terms ‘Saviour’ and ‘Lord’ undefined; the Saviour from sins is a divine Saviour, and Lord of All is a divine lord, and these are incentives to believe. Conversion brings growing understanding as the Holy Spirit speaks through the Word.

fully what each translation communicates.⁶ The study has been guided by Robert Reymond's excellent work entitled *Jesus, Divine Messiah: The Old and New Testament Witnesses* (hereafter referred to as *JDM*). For both the Old and

New Testament witness, attention is given first to general issues, then specific passages. The OT passages chosen for comparison are primarily those passages that the New Testament prominently identifies as Christological.

II. Old Testament Christological Passages

General Issues

The first general issue concerns the translation of the various names of God in the Old Testament. The most common names of God in the Old Testament are *Elohim*, *Adonai* and *Yahweh*. In English translations, *Elohim* is translated 'God', *Adonai* is translated 'Lord'⁷ and *Yahweh* is translated and printed 'LORD', which accommodates the Jewish practice of reading *Adonai* in place of *Yahweh* while distinguishing it from *Adonai* typographically. SVDB, KH and TAV carry on this tradition, using الله (*Allah*) for *Elohim*, and الرب (*Al-rabb*) for *Adonai* and *Yahweh*, except that there is no typographical device in Arabic to distinguish between the two source words *Adonai* and *Yahweh*. The KS changes this practice and usually uses *Allah* for *Yahweh* as well as for *Elohim*. KS also tends to avoid the use of الرب *al-rabb*, for *Adonai*, using rather المولى *al-mawla*, or السيد *al-sayyid*.

Al-Mawla is one of the 99 names of God, but *al-sayyid* is typically used for humans, not God. Whatever the motivation was to avoid *al-rabb*, the lack of consistency in translation masks the consistency in the original text and can be misleading. Particular care must be exercised where the names and titles of God are part of the Old Testament witness to a divine Messiah.

Pentateuch

Exodus 3:14-15⁸

God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you."

¹⁵God also said to Moses, 'Say this to the people of Israel, "The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.'

This passage is relevant to the deity of Christ because Christ uses its language in John 8:58 to indicate his

6 This article assumes the ability to read Arabic because it is intended to be an aid to those using the Bible in Arabic in ministry.

7 *Adonai* is used also as a title for human masters in the Old Testament. The discussion here concerns the translation of *Adonai* when it refers to God.

8 English Scripture references are from the *English Standard Version*.

pre-existence. The key phrase is translated in English by 'I am who I am'. The SVDB resorts to transliteration of the Hebrew, and the KH follows SVDB in transliterating, but then explains the meaning using parentheses inside the text (a questionable practice which KH perpetrates in other places as well). The TAV translates the phrase *أنا هو الذي هو* 'I am he who is he', which hints at the self-existence inherent in the Hebrew imperfect *ahya* and is partly reflected in the translation of John 8:58. The TAV has a footnote mechanism, but the connection between John 8:58 and Exodus 3:14-15 is not referenced. The KS translates the phrase, using *الله الذي اسمه أنا هو* 'The God whose name is "I am he"', which, while not being very literal, reflects the practice of identifying *Yahweh* and *الله* and further allows a clear identification of the parallel to *Yahweh* used by Jesus in John 8:58. However, the phrase misses the implication of self-existence. This situation will be considered again later in the discussion of John 8:58.

Passages from the Psalms

Psalm 2:7

I will tell of the decree:

The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'

This verse is a clear Messianic reference, and is quoted in the New Testament in Acts 13:33, Hebrews 1:5 and Hebrews 5:5. It is unquestionably one of the key verses that the New Testament used to explain the relationship between the Father and Christ. The Hebrew is not particularly tricky: a rigid rendering into English gives 'My son you are, I today have begotten you', which can lay over into straightforward Arabic, preserving even word order:

ابني أنت أنا اليوم ولدتك

With minor changes in word order, the SVDB, KH and TAV translate the phrase literally. However, the KS uses the phrase

أنت ابني، أنا اليوم تَوَجَّهْتُكَ ابناً لي

which in English is 'You are my son, I today have crowned you as a son for myself.' The NT citations of Psalm 2 in the KS reproduce this wording exactly.⁹ The most natural sense of this wording is that Christ *became* a son by appointment.

The KS phrase is a fair interpretation of the phraseology as applied to David; but it does not do justice to the NT application to Christ. To replace 'begotten' with 'appointed' or 'crowned' is to reduce the meaning and change it. This verse, in its OT setting and in its NT application to Christ, played a key role in the rejection of adoptionism and

9 A version of the KS New Testament was published before the OT, and the earlier printings differ from the apparently revised text of the NT in the whole Bible.

modalism in all its forms.¹⁰ Furthermore, the verse is important to the affirmation of Christ's full divinity.¹¹ If this rendition is not explicitly advocating an adoptionist Christology, it has certainly opened the door to it. The fact that the passage figures heavily into the New Testament's teaching on Christ, especially in Hebrews 1, compounds its seriousness.

Psalm 45:6-7

*Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.
The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of
uprightness;
7 you have loved righteousness and hated
wickedness.
Therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your
companions;*

The implications for the divinity of the coming King in this verse, which is applied to Christ in Hebrews 1:8, 9, lie in the identification/ differentiation inherent in the wording. In other words, the coming Messiah is called (vocatively) God, and yet differentiated also from 'God' by the use of the third person in verse 7 ('Therefore God ... has anointed you'). Numerous expedients have been employed to justify removal of the vocative ('O God') in verse 6, but

the reasons are more ideological than exegetical.¹²

The SVDB and KS make the vocative clear in verse 6, while the KH and the TAV suppress it.

Psalm 110:1

*The LORD says to my Lord:
'Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your foot-
stool.'*

This Psalm is the most-quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament. There are direct quotations of the first verse in Matthew 22:44, 26:64; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42, 43, 22:69; Acts 2:34, 35 and Hebrews 1:13, 10:13. Allusions include 1 Corinthians 15:25, Ephesians 1:20, Colossians 3:1 and Hebrews 1:3, 8:1, 10:12 and 12:2.

The witness of this verse to the divine character of Christ stems (as in Psalm 45:6-7) from the identification/differentiation motif, with God speaking to the Messiah both as God and yet distinct from Himself as the speaker: 'Yahweh says to my Lord'. However, communication of the 'identification' aspect depends on the translation of 'my Lord'.

The phrase 'my Lord' is the English translation of *Adoni*. The word is

10 See *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Chapter 16, by Robert Reymond.

11 The reader is encouraged to consider carefully the discussion of the Nicene teaching of 'the Father's eternal generation of the Son' and Calvin's insistence on the full, uncompromised deity of the Son, including self-existence, in *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, by Robert Reymond, pp. 324-330 (especially pp. 327-329).

12 JDM, pp 81-83.

used in the Old Testament to address God, but it can also be used to address a king or highly placed person, as in 2 Samuel 16:9. So whether or not the word is capitalized in English depends on whether the translator believes the referent to be God or a human. One could presumably translate the verse, 'The LORD says to my lord' (note the lower case) or equivalently 'The LORD says to my master.' However, to interpret the verse as 'The LORD says to my lord' or 'The LORD says to my master' requires a systematic denial of the New Testament use of the passage. Raymond's remark is right to the point: '[David] ascribes such 'lordship' to the Messiah that his superiority over David, as Jesus later would suggest in Matthew 22:45, cannot comport with merely human lordship.'¹³

The SVDB and KH commendably translate the phrase *قال الرب لربي* 'the Lord said to my Lord', whereas the KS substitutes *قال الله لسيدي* 'Allah said to my master', and the TAV uses *قال الرب لسيدي الملك* 'The Lord said to my master, the king'. The use of *سيدي* 'my master', obscures the nature of the three persons (God the Father, the Messiah, David as speaker) present in Psalm 110:1, but the TAV is particularly

troublesome, inserting material that alters the meaning and makes Jesus' use of the verse in Matthew 22:45 contradictory or incomprehensible.¹⁴

Passages from the Prophets

Some of the messianic highlights from the prophets are:

1. Isaiah 7:14-16, the virgin birth.
2. Isaiah 9:6-7, the wonderful names of the Messiah.
3. Isaiah 52:13-53:12, the song of the suffering, sin-bearing servant.
4. Daniel 7:13-14, the ascension and session of the 'Son of Man'.
5. Micah 5:2, the birthplace of the pre-existent ruler-to-be is Bethlehem.
6. Zechariah 12:10, the pierced Lord.
7. Malachi 2:17-3:1, the Messenger of the Covenant.

In the four translations, the treatments of Isaiah 7:14-16, Isaiah 9:6-7, Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Zechariah 12:10, and Malachi 2:17-3:1 clearly communicate the testimony to the deity of Christ. Certain aspects of the other passages need comment.

¹³ JDM, p 88.

¹⁴ One field worker reports that a group of believers from Muslim backgrounds was much confused by the TAV rendition of Psalm 110:1 when they compared it with Matthew 22:45.

Daniel 7:13-14

*I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.*

*¹⁴ And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.*

This passage is the origin of Jesus' 'favourite self-designation,' the *Son of Man*.¹⁵ The phrase *son of man* occurs in other places in the OT (e.g. Psalm 8, Ezekiel) and is usually idiomatic for 'a man'. However, the usage in Daniel is carried over literally by Jesus into the Gospels. It is also clear that Jesus used the phrase in the sense that Daniel meant it.¹⁶

The significance of the phrase is recognized by the SVDB, KH, and TAV, which translate it ابن الإنسان (the Son of Man). However, the KS translates the whole phrase 'like a son of man' as واحداً يشبه البشر or 'one resembling humankind'. In the *New Testament*, the KS translates the phrase *The Son of Man* as

الذي صار بشراً

or '[he] who became human' (see for example Luke 5:24, John 5:27). This makes it difficult to show the deliberate connection between the Son of Man of the Gospels and Daniel's 'one like a son of man'. Furthermore, the connection should not be discounted as esoteric or unimportant; at least three field workers in my city begin the study of Mark with seekers by reading Daniel 7:13-14 to show the meaning of the title 'Son of Man'.

Micah 5:2

*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans
of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.*

The messianic nature of the prophecy is clear, it being the basis of the expectation that a ruler would be born in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:3-6). Beyond this, there is the implication of the Messiah's pre-existence. This is seen in the time phrases 'from of old' and 'from ancient days' (or 'days of eternity'). The phrases can mean 'a long time ago', or 'eternity preceding the ... creation'.¹⁷ But the critical point concerns the interplay between 'go out' ('come forth' in the ESV) and 'goings out' ('origin' in the ESV). The Hebrew words have the same root. This latter phrase, which

¹⁵ JDM, pp 182-193.

¹⁶ See Matthew 26:64, where Jesus ties 'the Son of Man' to 'the right hand of God', a clear reference to Daniel 7 and possibly Psalm 110:1.

¹⁷ JDM, p 132.

occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible, is often translated ‘origins’, but this obscures the play on the root. Raymond translates the latter part of the verse:¹⁸ ‘From you for me will go forth the one to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, even from days of eternity.’

The SVDB translates the last part of the verse (starting with ‘For from you...’):

فمنك يخرج لي الذي يكون
متسلطاً على إسرائيل ومخارجه منذ
القديم منذ أيام الأزل

This makes clear the eternal nature of the time phrases and furthermore shows the relationship between ‘go out’ and ‘goings out’. As such, it points to a *pre-existent* divine ruler to come out of Bethlehem. In contrast, the KH, KS and TAV all make clear the eternal nature of the

time phrases, but the connection between the phrases ‘go out’ and ‘goings out’ is not as clear. TAV and KH use يخرج for ‘go out’ and KS uses يأتي KH and KS use أصل ‘origin’, for ‘goings out’, but the TAV skips the ‘goings out’ phrase altogether, translating

يكون منذ القديم منذ أيام الأزل

To summarize, these passages, upon which the New Testament erected its Christology, bear a strong and remarkable witness to the divinity of the coming Messiah. However, the witness is carefully expressed, and care must be taken for it to come through clearly. Evangelists and disciples should be familiar with the treatment of these passages in the translation that they are using and be ready to help the reader where the translation is not clear.

III. New Testament Passages and Considerations

General Issues¹⁹

The first general issue is the treatment of ‘The Son of Man’ title, and one that was raised in the discussion of Daniel 7:13-14 above. The details will not be repeated here, except to reiterate that the translation of ‘Son

of Man’ in the NT should make clear the connection to Daniel 7:13-14. The Gospels use the title 82 times, so this is not an arcane point.

The second general issue is related to the translation of *kurios*, which our English versions translate as ‘Lord’.

¹⁸ JDM, p 132. *Emphasis supplied.*

¹⁹ Much of this section deals with the titles of Christ, especially ‘Son of Man’ and ‘Lord’. Rick Brown has discussed these titles and alternatives to the title ‘Son of God’ in his article ‘The Son of God: Understanding the Messianic Titles of Jesus’, *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17 (Spring 2000) pp 41-52. The KS partially implements his suggestions. The article cannot be considered in detail here; I am preparing a response to Brown’s proposals.

This word, along with ‘Christ’ (anointed one, the Greek equivalent of ‘Messiah’), is one of the chief designations of Jesus in the New Testament. Its translation is therefore an issue not confined to one or two passages. There are two lines of thought to consider, one concerning the Greek background of the word, the other concerning the use of the word by Greek-speaking Jews, through the influence of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

That the Greek word *kurios* meant ‘lord’ is not in dispute. It was used of both gods and men. The best-known example of its use for a man is the phrase, ‘Caesar is Lord,’ a phrase that Paul seems to allude to when he writes to the Corinthians, ‘[...] no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit’ (1 Cor. 12:3). However, while acknowledging the use of *kurios* with men, it must be remembered that there was still often an implication of deity: Caesar was considered a ‘god’.

However, the use of *kurios* among Greek-speaking Christians of the first century, whether Hellenistic Jewish background believers or pagan background believers, was far more specific, owing to its use in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old

Testament. In the Septuagint, *kurios* is used to translate both *Adonai* and *Yahweh*. The use of *kurios* for the latter reflects the Jewish practice of reading *Adonai* in place of *Yahweh*, but it also gave a unique status to the word among Jews and Christians that discouraged its use – in an absolute sense – for men. It is a matter of history that many Christians were martyred because they would not confess, ‘Caesar is lord’ (*kurios*).²⁰ If the demand had been to acknowledge Caesar as king or master, there would have been no issue of conscience.²¹ But for the early church, Jesus was *kurios* in a way that excluded all others.

Having said that the early Christians used *kurios* differently from non-Christian Greek speakers, it is necessary to affirm that Christian usage was not so narrow and private that pagan Romans simply failed to understand the significance of the Christian use of *kurios*. The deaths of the martyrs cannot be construed as an unnecessary tragedy due to regrettable differences in ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ usage.

In the Arabic translations, the SVDB, the KH and the TAV almost uniformly translate²² *kurios* using *الرب* *al-rabb*. In contrast, the KS has an apparent

20 See *Christendom* by Roland H. Bainton, Volume I, pp 51-58.

21 See, for example, Luke 20:25.

22 More than 15 occurrences were reviewed in the Gospels and the Epistles.

23 See footnote 9 above.

policy of translating *kurios* using *sayyid* or *mawla*.²³ For example, in Acts 2:36 ([...] God has made him both Lord and Christ.) the KS translates

جعله الله المسيح سيِّد الكل

‘God made him the Christ, Lord (*sayyid*) of all’. In Philippians 2:11, (‘Jesus Christ is Lord’), the translation is

عيسى المسيح هو مولانا

‘Issa the Christ is our lord (*mawlana*)’. Occurrences of ‘The Lord Jesus Christ’ are translated using *sayyid* or *mawla* for *kurios*. Notable exceptions²⁴ to this general rule in the KS is Thomas’ exclamation in John 20:28, where the translation is

يا ربي والهي

and 1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 17:14 and 19:16. The last three references

have the important phrase

ملك الملوك ورب الأرباب

‘King of kings and Lord of lords’, applied to God the Father in 1 Timothy and applied to Christ in Revelation.

The decision in the KS to not use *rabb* to translate *kurios* impacts the New Testament witness to the deity of Jesus Christ. The impact of *sayyid* and *mawla*, especially the possessive form ‘our lord’ is much less,²⁵ causing the reader to put Christ on a level with the prophets when the text is pointing to something higher. Furthermore, the non-uniform treatment of *kurios* as a title of Christ is distracting and confusing to the person searching the Scriptures to see who Jesus is.

IV. Consideration of Specific Passages with Implications for the Deity of Christ

Jesus’ self-witness

The following discussion focuses on the two instances in which Jesus claimed absolute identity with Yahweh of the Old Testament. Those two passages are John 8:58 and John 13:19.

John 8:58

Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’

John 13:19

I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.

There are many ‘I am’ sayings in John’s Gospel, including ‘I am the good shepherd’, ‘I am the door’ and ‘I am the vine’. But the particular form of John 8:58 and John 13:19 is simply ‘I am’, which has a direct relation to the revelation of the name *Yahweh* to

24 Again, there is considerable difference between the earlier printings of the KS, which use predominantly *al-rabb*, and later printings, which prefer a form of *sayyid* or *mawla*.

25 The possessive forms of *sayyid* and *mawla* (*sayyidi*, ‘my lord’ and *mawlana*, ‘our lord’) are the common forms to address men. The definite form *al-mawla* is one of the 99 names of God.

Moses in Exodus 3. The last two Greek words of both verses are *ego eimi* (I am). The Septuagint translation²⁶ of the name of God in Exodus 3:14 is *ego eimi ho on* (I am the being [one]). The use of 'I am' without a complement in John 8:58 and 13:19, and the use of the Septuagint's wording, show that the connection is not spurious.

The SVDB, as mentioned previously, resorts to transliteration in Exodus 3, and uses **أنا كائن** for 'I am' in John 8:58 and **أنا هو** in John 13:19. The KH also expresses the idea of pre-existence in 8:58 using **كائن** but in a subjunctive phrase and with a significant reordering of the words. Its wording in John 13:19 is **أنا هو** as in the SVDB. The TAV uses **أنا كائن** for 'I am' in John 8:58 and **أنا هو** in John 13:19. The KS uses **أنا هو** in both John 8:58 and John 13:19, paralleling its treatment of Exodus 3:14-15.

There are two basic approaches, either to transliterate or to explain the meaning. The problem with transliteration is that the Hebrew verbs are unknown in Arabic, and so the connection between Exodus 3:14-15 and John 8:58 cannot be made without some external commentary. Giving the meaning of the phrase has the

potential to make the connection apparent. KH tries to do both transliteration and explanation in Exodus 3:14-15, but puts additional remarks in the text (as mentioned previously) raising new problems. The TAV wording in the Exodus 3:14-15 is not paralleled in John 8:58, but is paralleled in 13:19. The KS phrase lacks the implication of self-existence, but it makes the parallelism between the passages obvious.

Other witness from the Gospels

John 1:18

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

In the United Bible Societies' critical Greek text of the New Testament, 4th Edition, the phrase translated 'the only God' differs from the *Textus Receptus*, which has 'the only Son'. The manuscript evidence for 'the only God' was first put forward by F.A. Hort in 1876.²⁷ Since then the discovery of more high quality manuscripts has strengthened the conclusion that 'the only God' is the original phrase.²⁸

As in Psalm 110:1 and Psalm 45:6-7, it is the identification/differentiation motif that points to the deity of Christ.

The SVDB, the KH and the KS base their translations on 'the only Son'

26 The Septuagint can be viewed online: <http://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/online-bibel/septuagintalxx/lesen-im-bibeltxt/>.

27 *Two Dissertations*, F.J.A. Hort, 1876, cited in JDM, p 515.

28 JDM, pp 513-516.

phrase, while the TAV bases the translation on 'the only God' phrase. The complete SVDB was published in 1865, eleven years before Hort's work, so it is no surprise that it uses 'the only Son'. However, it is not apparent why KH and KS would use 'the only Son'.

Pauline Christological passages

The following passages were reviewed in the four translations: Romans 9:5 and Titus 2:13, Colossians 1:15-20, 2:9 and Philippians 2:6-11. In general, the four translations clearly witness to the deity of Christ in Romans 9:5, Colossians 1:15-20, and Colossians 2:9. The reader is encouraged to study the passages and think through their discussion in JDM. The other two passages need some comment.

Philippians 2:6-7

who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

The SVDB, KH and TAV all translate the phrase 'form of God' by

صورة الله

which is also the phrase used to translate 'image of God' from the Old Testament. The KS uses the phrase

طبيعة الله

which according to one believer from a Muslim background, is a very strong statement. However, it can also be problematic because طبيعة is normally used only for created beings.

Titus 2:13

'[...]waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,'

The translation of this verse presents a difficulty in Arabic. The key point is that 'God' and 'Saviour' refer to the same person.²⁹ However, the most straightforward way to handle the Greek phrases in Arabic is to use a chain of possessive nouns, but this can obscure from the reader that 'God' and 'Saviour' refer to one and the same person.

- SVDB : منتظرين الرجاء المبارك وظهور مجد الله العظيم ومخلصنا يسوع المسيح
- TAV: منتظرين اليوم المبارك الذي نرجوه، يوم ظهور مجد إلهنا العظيم ومخلصنا يسوع المسيح
- KS: بينما ننتظر أن يتحقق أملنا السعيد، بمجيء إلهنا ومنقذنا العظيم عيسى المسيح في جلاله
- KH: فيما ننتظر تحقيق رجائنا السعيد، ثم الظهور العلني لمجد إلهنا ومخلصنا العظيم يسوع المسيح

²⁹ JDM, pp 471-473.

The SVDB is very direct, but that leads to an ambiguity. Is it 'the appearing of the glory of our great God and [the appearing] of our saviour, Jesus Christ', with two 'appearings' and two different persons, or is it 'the appearing of the glory of the great God and our saviour', with 'great God' and 'saviour' referring to one and the same person? Likewise, it is not clear from the grammar of the TAV if 'God' and 'saviour' refer to the same person. The KS makes 'God' and 'saviour' refer to the same

person with 'great' as an adjective for both. The KH succeeds in showing the connection by breaking up the chain of possessive nouns with *ثم*

This may be the best solution to show that 'God' and 'saviour' refer to one and the same person (although that solution has other effects that represent a departure from the text). The evangelist or discipler can overcome any lack of clarity here; the important point for the deity of Christ is that one and the same person is meant.

V. Conclusion

The SVDB, the KH and the TAV give clear translations of the key Christological passages, with some failures of varying degrees as noted. Revisions that remedy these failures would be welcome. However, the KS witness to the deity of Christ is mixed. In many of the Christological passages, the KS treatment is very strong and accurate; in others, the treatment limits the application of the verse to its OT setting (especially Psalm 2:7) making NT use of the passage misleading or unclear. Some difficulties stem from the treatment of the titles of Christ. A revision of the KS that addresses the specific issues discussed above would strengthen the translation and make it more useful to church planters.

One aspect of the Bible's witness to the deity of Christ has not been

considered here. It is those passages in which the 'NT unhesitatingly applies'³⁰ to Jesus OT passages in which Yahweh (either as the speaker or one referred to) is the subject. Examples include Joel 2:32 by Acts 2:21 and Romans 10:13, Isaiah 8:14 by Romans 9:32-33, Isaiah 44:6 by Revelation 1:17; 2:8; 22:12-13, Isaiah 45:23 by Romans 14:11 and Philippians 2:10. I commend them to your study and witness.

The deity of Christ is a precious truth of the Gospel, and ultimately one of the greatest attractions of the Gospel to Muslims. In a day when the deity of Christ is often viewed as an embarrassment or spurious, may God grant that our translations and appeals give clear and unashamed witness to our divine Saviour and Lord.

³⁰ JDM, p 160.

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Choosing an Arabic Bible

Based on comprehensibility and translation philosophy

by Tim and Sharon Warner

Tim and Sharon Warner are translators in the Arab world. They have been living in the Arabian Peninsula since 1993.

Abstract

After evaluating the most common existing Arabic Bible translations as to where they fall on a 'formal equivalent – functional equivalent' scale, the authors used a representative selection of Bible verses from each translation to test comprehension among nine relatively open-minded, educated Yemeni readers. While all translations tested had some problems with comprehensibility, the formal translations were found to be much more difficult for respondents to understand than functionally equivalent (meaning-based) translations. The authors recommend further research and suggest their results will be useful for those wanting to communicate God's Word clearly to Muslim readers with little or no Bible background.

Introduction

Arabic Bible translations – just like Bible translations in English – vary greatly in their philosophies of translation. These Bible translations also differ in how well they are understood by Muslims and believers from Muslim backgrounds (BMBs). Over the past fifteen years in the Arab world, we have had the opportunity to watch our local friends interact with several major Arabic translations of the Bible. We have observed that formally equivalent translations (sometimes referred to as 'literal' translations) such as the Smith - Van Dyck - Bustani (SVB) were less easily understood by the Yemeni people we worked with than the translations

that tended towards functional equivalence (sometimes referred to as 'meaning-based' translations), such as the Today's Arabic Version (TAV) or the Sharif (SHR). We also noticed that most believers using and providing people with Arabic Bibles had little idea of which translations were available or which Bibles to choose for different circumstances. Sometimes they were not even aware that there were different translations to choose from.

A method of evaluating differences in translation philosophies and level of understandability suggested itself when one of us was recently reading Fee and

Strauss' book, *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions*, which compares English Bible translations along a form-function continuum.¹ We decided to apply their method to Arabic translations of the Bible in order to help ourselves and others in ministry to Muslims to choose an Arabic translation in a more informed fashion.

In our experience, few people, even when dealing with Bible translations in their own mother tongue, feel adequately knowledgeable in either biblical languages or the theory of translation to be able to make informed choices about which translation to use in different circumstances. In the sphere of Arabic Bible translations, this situation is compounded by the fact that the majority of people who use the Bible in ministry to Muslims are from non-Arabic-speaking backgrounds. They often base their decisions about translation choice on what other people use, on whether a parallel English translation is included, or even simply on what is available. It is our hope that this brief study will inform and provide an objective way to help in answering the following two questions:

1. Where do the current major Arabic Bible translations fall along the formal equivalent to functional equivalent spectrum?
2. How well are the most widely used Arabic translations understood by our Muslim cousins?

We are aware that emotions sometimes enter into these kinds of discussions and that 'Bible wars' may occur, most commonly with formal equivalence proponents pitching themselves against functional equivalence proponents and vice-versa (often with all too little Christian love in the exchange). In such a polemic environment, let us state our belief upfront, which is that no one Bible translation can meet all the needs for a language community. For those who have not been previously exposed to the Bible, a functionally equivalent translation is useful in order to 'get at the meaning' (unless the language community is so small that all members have access to a trained Bible teacher). On the other hand, for those who are already quite familiar with the Bible, a formally equivalent translation is a useful study aid, especially when accompanied by helps such as those found in Study Bibles. Finally, a mediating translation, which falls somewhere between the two poles of the spectrum, often provides a suitable middle-ground position for many readers.² We believe that there is no perfect translation and that there are mistakes in all translations. Yet the Holy Spirit uses these imperfect translations, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit is more crucial to understanding the truths of God than any particular translation.³

Methodology

The form-function spectrum

In the first stage of this study, twenty-five terms or lexical items were chosen from twenty-three verses in the following five Arabic Bible translations most commonly used in our area: Smith – van Dyck – Bustani (SVB), New Jesuit Version (NJV), New Arabic Version (NAV), Today's Arabic Version (TAV) and the Sharif (SHR). Verses were chosen exclusively from Fee and Strauss' book in order to avoid any bias of verse choice. These verses represent a spectrum of categories relevant to determining where any one translation falls along the formal-functional equivalence spectrum. Some of the categories represented are idioms, implicit/explicit information, genitive constructions and technical or theological terms. Further research might make use of additional categories and verses.

After choosing which terms to examine, we placed each translation in its place along the form-function continuum in the following manner: first, each verse in each translation was marked as to whether it represented a formal or functional translation of that term. The number of verses were then tallied and the translation was placed in its appropriate position along the

formal equivalence-functional equivalence continuum.⁴

Understandability: correct, wrong or unknown meaning

The interviewees

After classifying the verses according to formal or functional equivalence, we elicited local input, through one to three-hour interviews with nine native Yemeni Arabic speakers. Interviewees were chosen for their willingness to be interviewed on questions relating to the Bible. Although we attempted to interview Yemenis from a wide range of educational levels, all interviewees had an educational level well above the norm for typical Yemenis – either formally or through extensive reading and self-study. All except for two of the interviewees had graduated from university or were currently enrolled as students. One was a university professor. All were in their twenties and thirties and only one was a woman. As a group, our respondents also had had more contact with Christians and the Bible than is common for Yemenis as a whole: all but one had had some prior contact with Christians and only two had not had any contact with Scripture before (through reading the Bible, Internet, radio, talking to Christians, etc); three were BMBs.

Conducting the interviews

We and several other non-native Arabic speakers conducted the interviews. During the interviews, we initially looked at one term at a time in each of the different translations. However, we quickly discovered that with each translation following on so closely from the other, there was a lot of learning that took place as each successive translation of a term was encountered, so, as it turned out, we were not actually measuring how well a term was being communicated by each successive translation. Therefore, we chose to conduct the interviews by focusing on one translation at a time to avoid as much as possible this carry-over effect. Also, since our experience has shown us that as a general rule the more functionally equivalent translations tend to com-

municate meaning (whether it be correct or incorrect) more clearly than formally equivalent ones, we ordered the presentation of translations in our interviews from the formally-equivalent to the more functionally-equivalent versions, again in order to avoid influencing understanding as much as possible. The interviewee was given each term in the context of the immediate sentence or two in Scripture, to provide an adequate point of reference, and asked to explain how he or she understood its meaning. The interviewer immediately recorded the answer on a form provided, either in Arabic or translated into English. Then after working through each term for that translation version, the same process was repeated for each successive version.

Table 1: Example from Respondent Form

VERSION: NJV					INTERVIEWEE # 1			
Verse	English back-translation	Word	Correct meaning	Original		C	W	U
Matt. 7:29	Their scribes	كُتِبَتَهُم	Scribes (scholars & authorities on the Law)	Γραμματεῖς	Like the SVB: someone who writes, clerk / secretary		I	
2 Kings 2:7	The sons of the prophets	بني الأنبياء	Sons of the prophets (prophets' guild)	בני הנביאים	Like the SVB: sons of the prophets (اولاد)		I	

C = Correct meaning; W = wrong meaning; U = unclear meaning

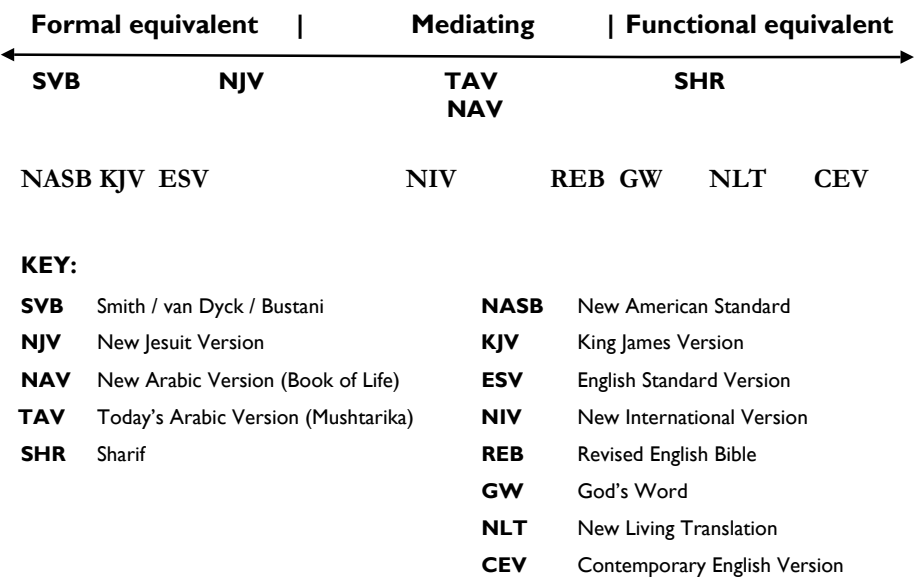
How results were evaluated

Results were tabulated on a spreadsheet and evaluated to determine whether answers conveyed a correct meaning, wrong meaning or a lack of understanding (see example in *Table 1* above). Some recorded answers were unclear to us due to inadequate recording, and were discarded. Finally, to check whether there might be bias of the researcher in assessing answers

from different translations or from different respondents, one of the authors randomly selected fifty answers from the various translations and respondents and reassessed how the original tabulator (the other author) would evaluate them as to understandability. In every case the answer was reassessed into the same category as that into which it had originally been placed.

Figure 1: Main Arabic Translations⁵

(English version in alternate font for comparison)



Results

Formal – functional equivalence range

As can be seen from the form-function continuum in *Figure 1* above which includes the English translations beneath

the Arabic ones for comparison, and the following summary *Table 2* on next page, the five Arabic translations appear to fall along a fairly broad range of the spectrum from Formal Equivalence (the SVB

and NJV translations) through Mediating (the NAV and TAV) to Functional Equivalence (the SHR translation). Based on Fee and Strauss' definitions, the SVB is an extremely formal equivalent translation, roughly equivalent to the NASB and KJV/ NKJV in English⁶; the NAV and TAV translations fall somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, rather like the English NIV; and the SHR is the sole functional equivalent translation (falling somewhere between the GW and NLT in English).

Communicativeness: Getting at the Correct Meaning

Now as interesting and as potentially useful as these results may be, the truly striking thing we discovered is not where any one translation falls along the formal-functional spectrum,

Table 3
Translation
Communicativeness

Version	% Correct	% Wrong	% Unclear
SVB	11	55	34
NJV	27	53	19
NAV	37	54	9
TAV	49	43	8
SHR	72	19	9
all	39	45	16

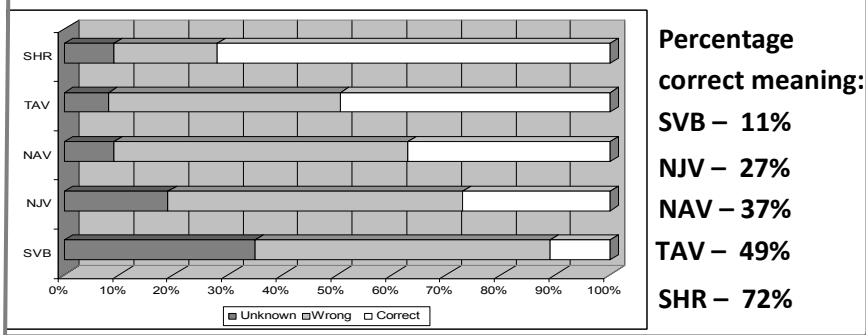
Table 2
Formal / Functional Equivalence

Version	Formally equivalent verses	Functionally equivalent verses
SVB	24	1
NJV	18	7
NAV	12	13
TAV	12	13
SHR	7	18
Formal Equivalence		
Mediating		
Functional Equivalence		

but rather how often the translations fail to communicate correct meaning. As we see in *Table 3* (above) and *Figure 2* (next page), figures range from 55% wrong and 34% unclear meaning for the SVB to 19% wrong and 9% unclear for the SHR, based on the terms examined in this study.

This failure to communicate correct meaning is especially noteworthy when we recall that our local informants were far more educated and biblically literate than the average person in Yemen, suggesting that the average person might understand even fewer of the verses. From *Figure 2* we can see that although

Figure 2: Arabic Translations - Charted for Meaning

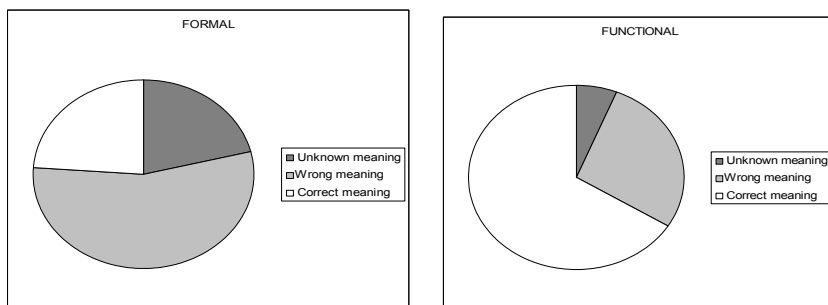


none of the translations can claim boasting rights to a high percentage of correct meaning, we do observe a fairly broad range in how accurate the translations are: the SVB has the smallest percentage of correct meaning at 11%, while the Sharif has the highest at 72%.⁷

Additionally, we see wrong and unknown renderings are not just found not in one type of translation, but in both formal and functional types of translations (see Figure 3 below). However, less *wrong meaning* arises from the functional side of the spec-

trum for, after all, the purpose of a functional equivalent translation is to clearly communicate meaning. We also see from the chart that the lion's share of *unknown meaning* comes from the formal equivalent translations (at roughly 20% versus 6% for the functional equivalent translations), especially the SVB. This is also not too surprising as these translations often use foreign grammar and construction, as well as rare lexical items, including borrowings from Greek and Syriac and literal idioms and metaphors which rarely communicate cross-linguistically.

Figure 3: Meaningfulness of Formal and Functional



Discussion

Possibilities for improving the study

As we mentioned above, our first goal in conducting this study was to find an objective way to evaluate Arabic Bible translations. We can see from the limited data in this study that the placement of Arabic translations along the form-function scale is as we saw in *Figure 1*, and that the understandability of Arabic translations is rather poor, especially in the more formal equivalent translations. However, there are a number of things we should consider. First, the number of terms examined and respondents interviewed in our study was quite low, with the latter representing a very small segment of the population. A greater number and variety of both verses and interviewees would have provided broader results, but this is difficult to do in Yemen due to people's reluctance to be interviewed or to approach the Bible.

With regards to the placement of the Arabic Bible translations along the form-function continuum, our experience would have us place both the NJV and the SHR more to the left on the scale than our study results show. The NJV should be placed near the SVB, with the SHR at the Mediating/Functional border in the region of the English REB. Further study utilizing a broader range of verses should clarify this situation.

As for our pool of interviewees, study results were obtained from a small group of fairly narrowly defined Yemeni Arabic speakers, and extrapolation can only be tentative. We expect that less educated Yemenis, which would include most women, would understand even less of the Bible than our group of respondents did, and many would be completely unable to read the text, as many Yemenis are illiterate. On the other hand, we would not be surprised to find greater understanding of these Bible translations in other areas of the Arab world that enjoy higher levels of literacy and greater exposure to Christians and Christian teaching.

Some answers received in the study were inadequately recorded and were therefore discarded from the data. This problem could have been resolved through better selection and training of interviewers in eliciting clear, useful data. We noticed, for example, that some interviewers accepted an answer such as 'he gave him another heart' for the Hebrew idiom (*wa yahafakh-lo lev 'akher*) 'he gave him another heart,' rather than asking the further question, 'What do you understand to be meant by that?' Although some interviewers could be easily trained to go that extra mile to elicit more useful data, others were naturals and knew intuitively how to 'get at the meaning' of what was in the head of the respondent. Another useful step would have been to make

audio recordings of the interviews, if interviewees were to allow this.

As verses were chosen exclusively from Fee and Strauss's book, the results obviously do not represent the level of understanding of the entire Bible by an individual. Verses were chosen by Fee and Strauss as those which are often more difficult to understand in an English translation; this does not necessarily reflect those verses difficult for Yemeni Arabic speakers, nor does it reflect the difficulty of the Bible as a whole. There was also no attempt to evaluate understanding of different genres (e.g. narrative in contrast to poetry or persuasive material).

Some general observations

The method of starting with all of the terms from one translation and then moving on to the next translation was designed to reduce the amount of carry-over from translation to translation, but some carry-over did inevitably happen. It is possible that as individuals were exposed to different versions of the same verse, 'learning' of meaning occurred, and a portion of the increase in understanding from form-based translations to meaning-based occurred because of the order in which the versions were presented. Support of this possibility might include the comment of one respondent on a later translation, 'So that's what that meant.' However, in such cases we found that when a formal equivalent translation then followed a functional one, rather

than giving what they now understood to be the correct meaning, they would say something like 'this one is like the SVB.'

People are problem-solving creatures. Each individual tried to find meaning in each text, sometimes making multiple hypotheses for possible meanings (e.g. 'the Pharisees must be a group from one village or place named Pharīs and the tax collectors [عشار] are from another place). On occasions where the text made no sense to the interviewee, the explanation given was that either a word was unfamiliar or that the combination of words did not make sense given the usual meaning of the words as the individual understood them. However, most individuals tried to derive meaning from what they were reading, often thinking about the verse for some time. In Exodus 34.13, for example, destroying Asherahs is spoken of. The NJV uses a word for *Asherahs* that means 'tent pegs' to our respondents. This led to misunderstandings such as 'the tent pegs which they worship,' or 'holy stakes? How can they be holy?' or, 'This answer is completely different [from SVB]. It means tent pegs...The things you thought were fixed and depending on, get pulled up ...maybe 'holy' should be taken sarcastically?' This last example highlights how our interviewees intelligently tried to understand what they were given, even giving abstract meaning to verses which otherwise seemed to make no sense. Interest-

ingly, education level within our group (of highly educated people) did not correlate with higher levels of understanding: the most highly educated member of our sample, who had one of the highest levels of exposure to Scripture, misunderstood about an average amount. On the other hand, the three BMBs (among them the two least educated members of our sample) had by far the highest understanding of these Bible verses, even though they did not have the greatest exposure to Scripture or to Christians. It is likely that these believers had learned relevant Bible background and cultural information through their fellow believers that, in conjunction with the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, enabled them to correctly interpret texts that would otherwise be obscure.

Misunderstanding due to world view differences

One thing that became very clear in people's responses to the verses was how strong the tendency is to base understanding of new material on previous knowledge and beliefs arising out of one's experience and world view. For example, in 2 Kings 2:7 the Hebrew refers to 'sons of the prophets' meaning a group of prophets from the company, or guild, of prophets (English translations NIB and NAB). This is literally translated in the Arabic SVB, NJV and NAV, and meaningfully as 'a group of prophets' in TAV and SHR. The only individu-

als in our sample who understood the correct meaning, even when reading the meaningful translation, were the three BMBs. In Islam, only one prophet is understood to be in the world at any particular time, so our Islamic respondents could not imagine there could be such a thing as a group of prophets. They therefore made the best sense they could of the passage, understanding it to mean either offspring of prophets or followers of prophets. This is an issue of world-view difference between the Islamic understanding of the world and the biblical one, rather than a translation issue.

Another example of how the Islamic world view prevails in Muslim reading of Scripture is the near universal misunderstanding of 'the righteousness of God' in Romans 1:17. In the original text, this refers to how God imputes righteousness to people, accepts them and includes them into his covenant community, but it was almost universally understood by our respondents to be related to people's obedience to God, to our correct behaviour in following his laws.¹⁰ Such misunderstandings of meaning will occur in any translation, regardless of translation philosophy. Teaching from believers (whether in person or in footnotes, by radio, or other books or tapes) is most likely to overcome this.

Conclusion

In spite of some of the weaknesses of this study that we have mentioned above, we nevertheless feel that we have made some progress towards evaluating Arabic Bible translations in a systematic and informed way. We also hope that our research will help readers to make a more informed choice on appropriate translations for communicating with our Muslim friends.

We were unable to evaluate in our research the recently-published inter-

pretive reading of the Gospels and Acts entitled *The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ*. This project was done by CBBs and BMBs working in collaboration with open-minded Muslim academics.¹¹ We expect that this text will fall further to the right on the form-function continuum than the Sharif. If it is easily understood by our Muslim friends, then this may provide yet another good option for our ministry toolbox.

Endnotes

1 Gordon D. Fee and Mark L. Strauss, *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007).

2 Fee and Strauss, p. 26, state, Formal equivalence, also known as "literal" or "word-for-word" translation, seeks to retain the *form* of the Hebrew or Greek while producing basically understandable English. This goal is pursued for both words and grammar..... functional equivalence, also known as idiomatic or meaning-based translation, seeks to reproduce its meaning in good idiomatic English. *Functional equivalence* was originally called *dynamic equivalence*.... Advocates of functional equivalence stress that the translation should sound as clear and natural to the contemporary reader as the original text sounded to the original readers.' For a more detailed discussion see the book.

3 Note, for instance, the many biblical authors' references to the Old Testament in which they quote the Greek Septuagint rather than the original Hebrew. Matthew, for example, in chapter 12, verse 21 of his Gospel, quotes the Septuagint translation for Isaiah 42:4 rather than giving his own Greek translation of the Hebrew original.

4 Determining whether any particular translation represents a formal or functional equivalent of the original term is usually quite straightforward, e.g., the NAV translation

الأنبياء بني

'the sons of the prophets' for *bene hanavi'iim* 'the sons of the prophets' (referring to the prophet's guild) is clearly formally equivalent, whereas the SHR translation جماعة الأنبياء 'the group of the prophets' is clearly functionally equivalent. However, sometimes the determination is not so easy. For example, the SVB translation of Pilate's

rhetorical question, Μητι εγω Ιουδαιος
'Am I a Jew,' is

ألعلى أنا يهودي

'Am I perhaps a Jew'. Although not completely a word-for-word translation, it is nonetheless clearly not a functionally equivalent translation (which would be something along the lines of 'I am not a Jew') and was marked in this study as being formally equivalent to the original.

5 Placements for English versions along the spectrum taken from Fee & Strauss, 2007.

6 KJV and SVB can also be equated in their use of language not currently in common parlance, in the fact that both are based on the Erasmus Greek translation tradition rather than the more common NA27/UBS4, and also in how some groups who have traditionally used them hold firmly to the translation as sacred, the only 'true Bible'.

7 Interestingly, for the three BMBs, the NAV had the highest understanding rate at 65%. Our suspicion is that this might be due to the fact that the majority of non-native Arabic-speaking church planters (at least those we've come across in our fifteen years of ministry in Yemen) tend to use this version in their work, resulting in the NAV being the familiar one to most BMBs.

8 One example, offered by Rick Brown in an email communication, is Mark 1:9 which says in ESV 'In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.' Arabic does not have a passive construction

with an agent, but SVB tried to create one:

واعتمد من يوحنا في الأردن

'and (Jesus) leaned away from John in Jordan.'

9 A few examples of these loan words are *karaza* 'to preach' from the Greek *kerûsso*, *nâmûs* 'the Law (of Moses)' from the Greek *nomos*, and *malakût* 'kingdom' from the Syriac *malkût*, even though in Arabic *malakût* means 'sovereignty'.

10 Example responses: 'Righteousness is what God announces about how we behave,' 'how people become obedient,' 'obedience to God,' 'In the *Injeel* (Gospel), the obedience to God is revealed,' 'God explained how a person can become obedient,' 'how God gives to man filial obedience from his works,' 'God reveals what people can do to be righteous before him (the way of the righteous),' 'God announces how we can be righteous, walk in duty,' 'God showed us how he can consider us to be righteous (if we follow his laws).' One person said, 'righteousness (of God) which we present to him through our obedience. The word "God" not important - it just clarifies "godly righteousness". We obey him in godly righteousness.'

11 المعنى الصحيح لإنجيل المسيح can be ordered through the following website: www.al-kalima.com. It can also be purchased directly from this online bookstore: <http://www.adabwafan.com/display/product.asp?id=61495>.

Initial Response to Reading *The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ*

by Phillip Drapper

Phillip and his wife Cindy have lived in the Arab world for ten years. For the past seven years they have been involved in church planting and evangelism in North Africa.

I received a copy of *The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ* in May when it was distributed at the national book fair in the country where I work. I had heard that sales were very good and was very interested in reading it because it had created a little controversy among the workers. What follows is not a book review as such, but an initial reaction to the publication. My goals in writing this are to lay out some issues for future discussion. Since I have gone over the translation quickly and have only read some of the articles, I feel that this is all I can do at the moment.

My first comment on the book relates to its format. It is not just a translation of the Gospels and Acts, but it also contains articles on a variety of subjects, mostly relating to concepts and objections that Muslims have concerning the Bible. This, I believe, is an excellent idea. I have always tried to get Muslims to read one of the Gospels and to pray that God would reveal Himself to them. While in most cases I would still just give an individual Gospel to a seeker, I might use a book like this for someone who has serious questions about Christ.

As I look at the titles of the articles, I am very impressed in that they almost all answer questions that Muslims ask about the New Testament. For example: 'The Concept of Inspiration in Christianity and Islam', 'The relationship of the Messiah to God' and 'The Meaning of the Phrase "Son of God"'. The only other issue I can think of that should be covered would be that of Israel in the Bible versus modern-day Israel. There are a few articles that deal with things that do not normally trouble Muslims, but in general I can't disagree with the selection of topics. What needs to be determined, though, is how well the volume accomplishes its goal. The articles themselves also need further analysis: how true are they to New Testament theology? I felt that the article on the Kingdom of God was very good but I need to look more closely at some of the others.

I do, however, have two concerns after reading this translation. The first deals with the way that *salaam alayhu* (peace be upon him) is written after the names of prophets and *salaamahu alayna* (his peace be upon us) is written after the name of Jesus. While I have heard that some people are against this for theological reasons, I

am more concerned about how this might be perceived by readers. I applaud the fact that the translators want to show that Jesus is unique, but this is done in a way that the biblical writers clearly do not do. In fact, it seems almost gimmicky to me. I would raise the question for further discussion: does this add anything to the translation? Will this make Muslims more receptive to reading it?

The other concern deals with the translation of the terms 'Son of God' and 'Father.' 'Son of God' is translated *habib Allah al-wahid* ('the unique beloved of God') or just 'Messiah'. In John 1:18 the term *ibn Allah* appears in the actual translation, so it is not true that the term is totally removed from the translation. Actually, there is a footnote explaining the translation of *ibn allah* as *habib Allah al-wahid* in John 1:18. Also there is an article in the volume about 'Son of God.' The article correctly links the term to the chosen King in the line of David. However, at the end of the article, there is a very strong statement: 'The expression "Son of God" simply means "the awaited messiah" or "Glorious King", nothing more and nothing less.' The adding of 'nothing more or nothing less' seems to minimize the richness of the meaning of both 'Messiah' and 'Son of God'. An interesting recent treatment of the term appears in chapter 14 of Gordon Fee's *Pauline Christology*. I realize that this is dealing with Paul, but you see the same development in the Gospels, especially in John.

This seems to me to present problems for translating certain passages. In Paul, we see a lot of emphasis on the concept of 'Eternal Son of God', especially in Ephesians. How can we eliminate father/son terminology from verses like Ephesians 1:2-3, 4:13 and 6:7, 23? It seems like when you come to Paul, you have to return to sonship language.

In the present volume there is another place where I think it doesn't work at all. Matthew 28:19 is translated *taharuhum bilma' bism allah wa masiihi wa ruuhihi ilqadus* (cleanse them with water in the name of God, His Messiah, and His Holy Spirit). This seems to be a deliberate attempt to eliminate proto-trinitarian language. Not only are Father and Son eliminated, but possessive pronouns are added before Messiah and Holy Spirit. I understand what the translators are trying to do, but this is very radical. Hopefully, they were consulting NT scholars as they were doing this. Why not leave the term 'Son of God' in the translation and include the article in the appendix?

Also, the word 'father' is translated *wali* instead of *ab* which is found in most other Arabic translations. Of course these terms can be used interchangeably, but they do have slightly different nuances. The term *wali* has a nuance of having authority or responsibility over another; whereas the term *ab* has a nuance of love and intimacy. I have had Arabs say that *wali* is not so shocking for Muslims whereas *Ab* is very shocking.

However, I have found that Muslims who come to faith in Jesus are very drawn to the concept of God as a loving father. Could this lead to misunderstand in people's minds? If I believe that a word means one thing, while the person I am talking to attaches another meaning to it, we are not really communicating.

Let me state in conclusion that this is just my initial reaction to the volume. I look forward to reading it in more depth in the coming months. Also let me say that the translators have done a lot of good things as well. The pre-existence of Christ is very clear in John 1. John 14 is also clear about Jesus being the only way to approach the Father. My prayer is that some of the people who read this book will be drawn to faith, commitment and a personal relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I was asked by a person involved in the translation how I could see this book being used. I told him that there were first of all some limitations on it just because of the format. It could never be used as a Bible for a church or small group. I think this will remain true even when the whole New Testament is completed. I see its use as being quite limited. If I was talking to someone about Christ and I felt that the person was a sincere seeker who had serious intellectual questions about the Gospel, I would maybe give him this book. I would, however, have to be convinced that he would read it. Otherwise, I would just give him a Gospel of Luke. My main hope for the volume is that people who have no contact with believers will purchase it at a book fair or in a shop and that through this book, they will encounter the Living Christ.

PART 2: EXPATRIATE WORKERS LEARNING AND WORKING WITH ARABIC

Optimal Language Learning: Learning from those who have done it

by SB

SB, along with his family, has been living in North Africa for 14 years where he and his wife have been very involved in CP and running his own business. Currently he is serving as a country leader for our company.

Introduction: The Language Survey

Language ability is one of our highest values as a company. Being able to communicate in the heart language of those we minister to is foundational as God works through us to establish his church in the Arab world. I am thankful that as an organization we place such a high value on learning language – through encouraging language learners to set aside adequate finances and time for study, by directing them to quality language schools and by providing support and counsel to assist them.

Recently I surveyed the workers in our region in North Africa in an effort to discover the current levels of language ability. More importantly though, I was interested in discovering the factors that past and current language learners felt had contributed to their successful language learning, as well as those they felt had been a hindrance. With more and more language students coming into

our region, I hope that the information gleaned from seasoned language learners through this survey will be helpful in guiding new language students as they lay the foundations for their own language learning.

In December 2007, I surveyed thirty-eight people in relation to two general areas. First, I was interested in knowing each person's current level of fluency as well as the level they felt was needed for life and ministry. My second interest was in discovering the factors that had contributed both positively and negatively to their learning of the language. The average length of time that those who responded to the survey had lived in North Africa was nine years, and their average time in the Arab world was twelve years. The newest members surveyed had been in country for only one year, while the longest serving member had been in country for over thirty years.

The languages covered in the survey were French, Colloquial Arabic (CA), Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Berber. For the sake of this article, I will focus only on the two main languages, CA and MSA, since these are the two primary ministry languages for our personnel throughout the Arab world. Although thirty-eight people were surveyed, I did not include the results of the seven people who were still in their first two years of CA studies. It is very unlikely that they could have reached a solid level of fluency in this short amount of time and they had not yet begun any MSA studies. I was more concerned with the levels of those who had already passed through their formal language training period.

The language level scale I used for the survey was the one that we have traditionally used in our company, which measures fluency on a scale of 0 to 4.

- At **Level 0** a person has roughly fifty vocabulary words and is able to understand and give basic greetings.
- At **Level 1** person has survival and basic courtesy vocabulary. Certain sounds are still a problem, accuracy in grammar is limited to set expressions, and speech is slow and requires enormous effort. Comprehension requires slow speech and much repetition.
- At **Level 2**, a person is rarely unintelligible but still needs practice with pronunciation. There is

fair control of the grammar and an ability to convey meaning accurately with simple sentences most of the time. Vocabulary is adequate for social conversation and routine tasks or job needs. Fluency is usually hesitant and occasionally the person is forced to silence by limited grammar and vocabulary. While direct speech is generally understood, utterances sometimes need to be repeated or reworded. Usually a Level 2 person is not able to follow conversation between native speakers.

- At **Level 3**, the person's pronunciation is sometimes foreign but always intelligible. There is good control of basic grammar and an ability to almost always convey meaning accurately and in reasonably complex sentences. Vocabulary is adequate for participation in general conversation and for professional discussion in his or her field. Speech fluency is rarely hesitant and the person is able to sustain a steady flow in conversation. A Level 3 person is able to understand most of what is said to him or her and can follow most conversation between native speakers, though not in great detail.
- At **Level 4**, mistakes in pronunciation are very rare and the person makes only occasional grammar mistakes. Professional and general vocabulary is broad and precise and appropriate to the occasion. Speech is practically effortless and easy to listen to. Although the Level 4 per-

son may be baffled occasionally by local colloquialisms, he or she can

understand all educated speech in any clear context.

Language Fluency Levels

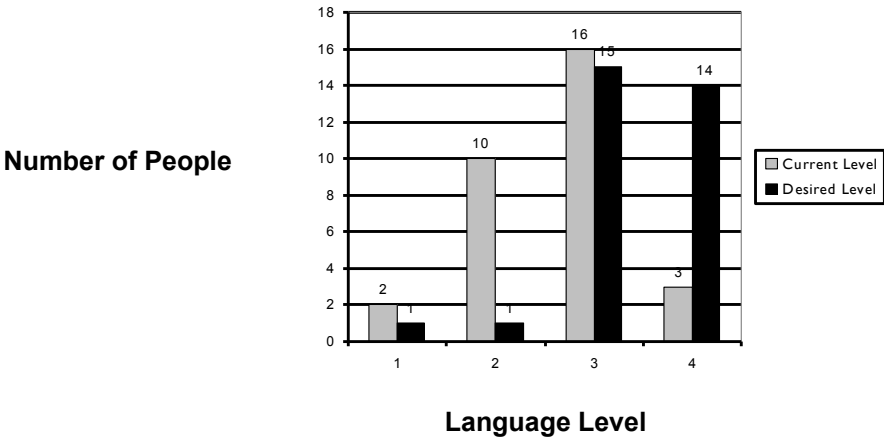
The first part of the survey asked two personal questions about the person’s language ability. The first question was ‘At what level of fluency do you currently function?’ The second was ‘What level of fluency do you feel is needed or desired for your ministry/work context?’ Thirty-one people, who had been in the country for more than two years and who had finished their formal language training, responded to these questions.

Colloquial Arabic (CA) is the primary ministry language for this region and we encourage the majority of our personnel to aim to achieve

Level 3 or 4 in CA.¹ Nineteen of those surveyed – more than 60% – said that they were currently at Level 3 or 4. Twenty-nine of the thirty-one were functioning at Level 2 or higher. When we asked what level each person felt was needed or desired for life and ministry, twenty-nine said they wanted or needed Level 3 or 4. Although we would always like to see a greater percentage of our people reaching higher levels of fluency, these numbers show that the majority of our people are arriving at high levels of Colloquial Arabic. In addition, and more importantly, they are recognizing and continuing to aim at

¹ We do now have a small number of personnel moving into Berber areas where Berber will most likely be the predominant ministry language.

Figure 1: Colloquial Arabic Levels



acquiring higher levels of proficiency for life and effective ministry here. Levels in MSA fluency were much lower than those of CA. The survey of MSA was divided into three areas: reading, writing and speaking. Of these three, those surveyed felt that reading in MSA was of highest importance while writing and speaking MSA were of least importance. Twenty (65%) felt that Level 2 to 4 in reading MSA was necessary although only thirteen (41%) were actually at these levels. In contrast, only around twelve (40%) felt that Level 2 to 4 in writing and speaking ability in MSA was necessary and less than 19% had acquired that level.

One of the factors that may contribute to these low levels of fluency in MSA is that new people are required to learn French before they arrive in North Africa, followed by Colloquial Arabic upon their arrival in the region. Since MSA is the third language most people learn, they may not be acquiring higher levels because of language-learning fatigue, lack of finances and time, etc. As a side note, over 80% of those surveyed had French at Level 2 to 4 and nearly 75% felt that Level 3

to 4 French was necessary. In spite of the importance of French in this region, if we want to see more people at higher levels of proficiency in MSA, we may need to rethink the requirement to learn French first – at least for those who really want to acquire a higher level of MSA.

Another factor that possibly contributes to low levels in MSA is that literacy in this region is not very high and as a result, most people are oral learners. Many of our workers find that they can minister effectively orally in CA and do not feel pressed to have a strong level of MSA.

These two factors may concern the North African region more than they do the Middle East or Arabian Peninsula regions, where learning French first is not necessary and where literacy rates may be higher. It would be interesting to see the contrast between North Africa and the Middle East and Arabian Peninsula in regards to levels of MSA acquisition among our membership.

Factors and Analysis

The second part of the survey focused on the more practical aspects of language learning. My goal was to determine the factors that either contribute to or hinder people from acquiring the needed language level, and it is this information that I hope will prove to be the most

valuable as a guide for our new language students in their language learning efforts.

People were asked, first of all, to note in order of importance the factors in their language learning experience that they felt most contributed

to them acquiring the language well. They were then asked to note any negative factors that hindered them from reaching the level they were aiming to acquire. The response to these questions came from their experience of learning French and Colloquial Arabic rather than Modern Standard Arabic.

Of greatest interest to me was the contrast between the positive factors that were listed by those who had achieved a Level 3 or 4 in CA and the

negative factors listed by those who were aiming for a higher level of language proficiency but had not yet acquired it. This information, I feel, gives us a helpful idea of what language learners need to incorporate into their language learning efforts and what things they need to avoid if they wish to learn the language well.

The following chart shows the positive factors that were listed by people who have acquired Level 3 or 4:

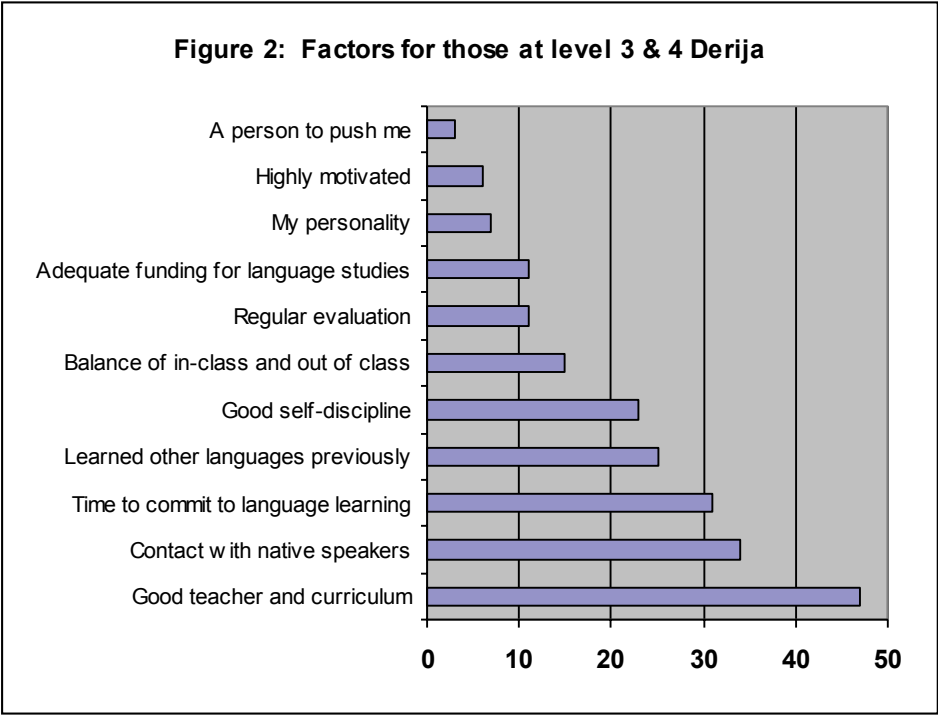


Figure 3 (on the next page) shows the negative factors that were mentioned by those who were aiming for Level 3 or 4 but had not yet reached it.

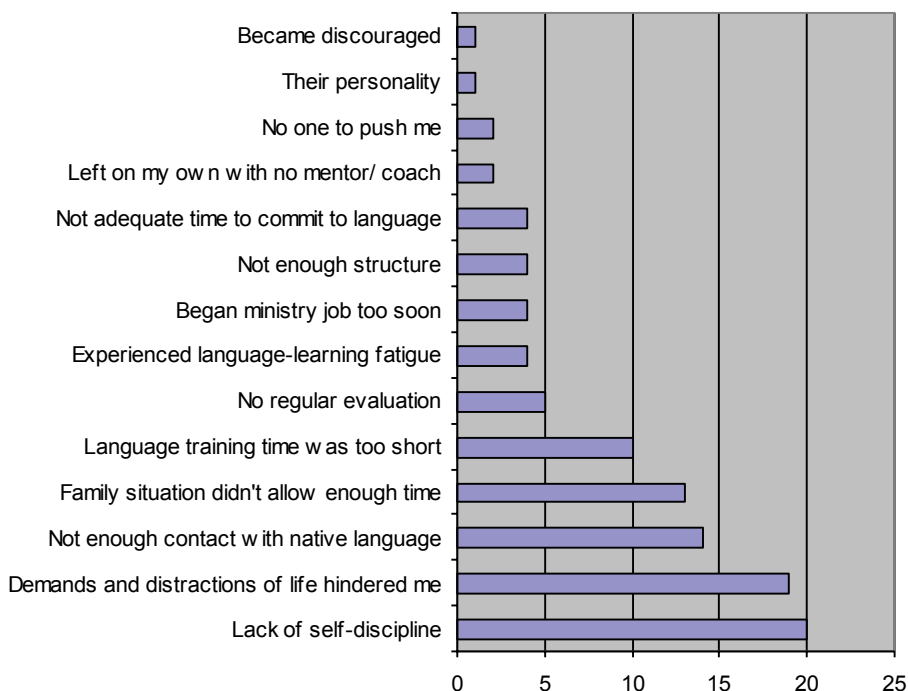
This survey overwhelmingly stressed the importance of having a good teacher and curriculum for learning a language well. Everyone has different learning styles but even for those

(like me) who learn best by getting out and using the language, and not necessarily studying from a book or in a classroom, the classroom is still important. The contrast I have witnessed over my thirteen years living in the Arab world, between those people who set aside adequate time and money and put the effort into formal language study, and those who do not, is striking. Trying to learn language almost exclusively outside of the classroom or on the street through untrained tutors has not yielded a lot of success in our region.

The failure of many who have not gotten the language is in almost every case linked to the lack of time spent in a good formal learning situation. We need to encourage language students to not cut their formal language study time short but to set aside adequate time and finances to complete their studies.

As we see from this survey there are two other important factors that are addressed on both lists: time and contact with native speakers. Adequate time set aside for formal study

Figure 3: Factors for those at level 2 not arriving at 3 or 4



with a good teacher and curriculum coupled with adequate time and contact with native speakers create a strong scenario for successful language learning. This reinforces the fact that in the early years we need to look at language study as our full-time job. This means not just the two or three hours spent in class along with the one or two hours spent on homework each day, but also spending another two to three hours every day getting out and talking with people. Maximum time and contact with native speakers is vital, whether it is talking to your local store owner, your maid, your neighbours, men at the local café, friends you meet at a local club, drinking tea with shop owners in the old medina, engaging taxi drivers in conversation, taking public transport or walking rather than isolating yourself in a car, or paying bills in person rather than through automatic bank withdrawals. There are many ways to engage in conversation with native speakers in Arab culture.

It may be helpful for more seasoned language learners to make a list of ways and places where new people can meet native speakers in their city and to help open doors for them to meet and build relationships with local people. Those who are extroverted can more easily create opportunities to relate to native speakers, but it will require some self-sacrifice and discipline from those who are introverted to step out of their comfort zones and initiate relationships. Since contact

with native speakers seems to be such an important factor in good language learning, we need to look for ways that extroverted members can help those who are introverted.

Most of us have been thankful for the Internet and the many ways its advancements in recent years have enhanced our work and ministry. But I am concerned about the big role technology can play in hindering us from maintaining maximum time and contact with native speakers. Voice over Internet Protocols like Skype and Vonage and blog sites like Facebook have enabled overseas workers to easily maintain verbal and written contact with families and friends in their home countries for very little or even no cost. These technologies can not only affect the amount of time and contact students have with native speakers; they also play into the factors that were listed of having too many distractions and not enough self-discipline.

It can be very easy to spend large amounts of time talking on Skype with family and friends in our home countries and sitting in front of a computer chatting, blogging or writing emails. These temptations are great, especially when language learning gets difficult and one is going through culture shock and wants to withdraw from the local culture. If new language students are going to learn the language well, they will need good self-discipline in this area and maybe stronger levels of accountability that direct

them towards interaction with native speakers and away from so much time dialoguing in their mother tongue on the Internet.

One of the other negative factors for people not arriving at the level of language they would like seems to be connected to distractions and demands of life – specifically the demands of family, which take up time and energy. The busyness of family life and the energy and time it takes just to live in the Arab world make it easy to let language learning get squeezed out. We need to identify these distractions and demands in each of our contexts and look for practical ways to overcome them.

In North Africa we discovered that it is very helpful to hire a maid to clean the home, cook meals and, in some cases, provide child care for a few

days each week. This not only frees up time for the wife, in particular, but also provides someone for her to speak to in Arabic. At the same time, it gives her a valuable source of cultural information. This may not be the case in the Middle East or the Gulf where most maids are not Arabic speakers.

Having children integrate well into the local culture can also play a significant role in alleviating family pressures. We have seen that when we equip our children with a usable language, they fit more easily into the culture around them. Putting them into the local school gives Dad and Mom some time to work on learning the new language themselves and helps the children to do the same. Of course, this depends a lot on the specific child and the educational opportunities available.

Conclusion

The information gleaned from those who have already gone through the language-learning process is a real gift to those who are just starting. My desire is that it will stimulate new language students to reflect seriously on how to organize their language learning time so as to learn language well. I hope that they will discover ways to enhance the positive factors and be able to lessen the influence of some of the negative factors in their language study.

I would also like to challenge those who are helping new language learners. As they reflect on the results of this survey, they need to think about how they can better assist and encourage language students. It is my hope that they will be able to develop practical ways in their own context to lead language students to high levels of fluency and thus, to better equip them to glorify God in the Arab world.

Learning Arabic Effectively*

Tips from a trainer of Arabic teachers in the Arabian Peninsula

by SR

SR first went out to the Arab world in 1991, and her husband, PR, was the founder and first director of the Gulf Arabic Programme (www.gapschool.net) in Al-Ain/Buraimi. She worked alongside PR the whole time doing teacher training and working with the materials. Although PR resigned as the director of GAP in 2006, she has continued working there, and has worked with more than 300 full-time students, eight Gulf Arab teachers, two Middle Eastern teachers and three Western teachers.

Get a good foundation in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)

I often come across the attitude, 'I only want to be able to speak to people'. If you only speak colloquial Arabic, you are easily thought of as an illiterate person who might be very pleasant to be around, but you run the risk of not being taken seriously in any discussions of importance and certainly not in religious matters. Even illiterate Arabs themselves more easily listen to those who sound educated, as the Arabic language is seen as something revered and God-inspired, not just a tool for communication. If you have to move at any point, the transition to a new dialect will also be a lot easier if you have a foundation in MSA to fall back on. In my opinion, the best material currently available to learn MSA is the *Al-Kitaab* series (Georgetown University Press).

In teaching, use only the Arabic language from the start

It is not helpful to try to translate or explain in English or any other language, things like 'Assalaamo aleikum' which means 'peace be upon you', but is really a greeting phrase like 'hello'. To explain the meaning of such expressions just confuses beginners. We simply let the teacher repeat the phrase a number of times, shake hands, use pictures and so on, and language understanding will build up.

Have fun while learning!

This means both laughing at oneself ('Oops! I said *hot sword* instead of *hot summer*!') and using the little Arabic you have learned in amusing sentences. If you have learned the words for 'dinner' and 'cockroach', try using them together in a sentence, and you will more easily remember both of these words.

* The editor asked colleagues whose work involves teaching Arabic to foreigners to share what they have found to be vital in helping people learn the language well. Two such professionals shared some tips.

Do not use transliterations

There are ten sounds in the Arabic language that do not exist in English, so when you use transliterations, you have to make up symbols for these anyway. You use more parts of your brain if you associate a sound with the Arabic letter when you see it, hear it and write it. This leads to a more accurate pronunciation from the start. Using Latin, Korean or any other script that you know well may seem quicker and easier, but it is a bit like walking with a crutch when you don't really need one; it will in most cases take a lot longer to get the stability you need. When teaching the alphabet, we have used *Alif Baa*, the introductory book in the *Al-Kitaab* series (Georgetown University Press). Recently, we have started to use the cheaper, but just as good, book *Hayya Bina*, which is produced in Bahrain.

Practice active listening

Listen actively, both when the teacher is talking and when you are out visiting locals. Two aspects come to mind.

- Listen for understanding. When what you hear seems to be over your head, try to pick out words you know, look at how the person is expressing him/herself and try to feel what is being communicated. If you understood two words in five sentences, you were not completely lost!
- Listen for accuracy. Pay close attention to how they say things, in what order words come, how

they use tenses, etc. Try to spell out words in your head 'was that a *siin* or a *Saad*?' (the two different 'Ss' in Arabic).

Treat Arabic learning as a full-time job

In addition to three to four hours in the classroom five days per week, you need to do homework as well as go out and practise what you have learned among locals. Students who try to work part-time in parallel with their Arabic studies usually do not succeed in becoming as proficient as they could, and some fail in their language learning altogether.

Measure your progress by looking back

'Three months ago the script looked like worms, now I can read out most words I see.' 'One month ago I would never have been able to express that thought!' Be encouraged by your own progress, not discouraged by the smartest classmate, who seems to grasp anything without trouble. Many people say to me that Arabic seems difficult for foreigners to learn. I do not deny that it takes work, but I strongly believe that anyone who applies him/herself can do it. We have seen people with learning difficulties learn to communicate well, and we've seen high achievers excel in Arabic.

Enjoy learning Arabic, and enjoy the excitement of understanding and being understood by the people we love and want to reach in their heart language.

Tips from an Arabic programme director in North Africa

by SH

Following many years of service in the Marseille Media Centre, SH and her husband, AH, moved to North Africa more than ten years ago. One of our few Syrian members, she worked for several years, until this past summer, as the director of the local branch of DMG Arabophon, a chain of language-training centres founded by another colleague. (See <http://www.arabophon>.)

The course content and design need to relate to the local context

One of the key elements for learning Arabic is being in the context. Learning a spoken dialect is never complete in class. One must spend plenty of time listening to locals to start with, and a lot of time practicing what one learns in the classroom. For example, at DMG I used to insist that the teachers take the students to the market when they did a lesson on prices and money. There is a lot to learn outside the classroom.

Our courses were developed by DMG and are related to the daily life of the people. They are not just lists of vocabulary that you might never use. DMG always found that teaching culture is an important element of language learning. Foreigners need to learn how people around them think, not just how they speak. That way, they can talk to them about issues that relate to where people are at. We covered things like Ramadan, engagement, weddings, funerals, doctors, schools, sitting in a café... In courses like these, we would have the students see, hear or experience these

events, and we taught them appropriate cultural practices and sayings.

Also, we insisted on homework assignments. When they were learning *darija* (colloquial Arabic), the tasks were not written, but were usually oral. For example, they needed to ask someone about their wedding and bring back information of something new they had learned.

Assessments are very important

Some students assess themselves, but that is not enough. They need to be assessed by a proficient Arabic speaker. We worked hard at producing a good assessment for DMG.

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is important

Unfortunately, not many people take classes in MSA. It seems that people think they can learn MSA on their own. However, through the years, I have noticed that people develop bad habits and learn wrong pronunciation, which undermines everything they are trying to accomplish in learning the written language. MSA needs diligent work. It is logical and interesting.

The problems with the Arabic text *Al Kitaab*

In DMG we used *AL Kitaab*. It is okay, but I have many reservations about it. One of the problems is that it is Egyptian (nothing against that), and so the Arabic native speakers use the Egyptian dialect on the DVD that is meant to help the students learn to speak! It is just not helpful to teach a dialect that is spoken only in one country. All the students I taught refused to do the speaking part because it was in Egyptian, so I used to prepare my own material to help them speak in MSA. Had they chosen a universal Middle Eastern dialect,

close to the Lebanese, Syrian and Jordanian dialects, the Arabic would have been a lot more useful and universal across the Arab world. These countries use similar vocabulary and their dialect is much closer to MSA.

My other problem with *Al Kitaab* is that it has too much English and does not allow for much oral practice. When teachers follow it faithfully, their teaching is lacking because the textbook lacks creative oral practice exercises. For that reason, when I used to train our teachers, I would spend many hours showing them games and exercises to use with the book.

...teaching culture is an important element of language learning. Foreigners need to learn how people around them think, not just how they speak. That way, they can talk to them about issues that relate to where people are at.

Arabic, a Love Language to the People of the Gulf

*by multiple authors**

**This article was written collaboratively by five company workers in Oman and the United Arab Emirates who have formally studied Arabic and worked in the Gulf for ten or more years. The lead writer is a woman; two other women and two men also contributed.*

The Arabian Gulf

The population dynamics of the Arabian Gulf are vastly diverse and perpetually in a state of fluctuation. In many ways, I see the citizens of these oil-wealthy countries as log runners – those who attempt to keep precarious balance by running forward and then back-peddling, while the log beneath them is being swept along by the flow of the river. They embrace progress with delicious terror, hungry for the temporary satisfaction

that it brings, but anxious about the effects it is having on their culture. In the arenas of trade and commerce, they have always connected with the broader world, but since the discovery of oil, there has been an unprecedented vulnerability to both the positive and negative effects of globalization. Their safeguards to maintaining their identity have primarily been Islam and the Arabic language.

The value of Arabic language

Some of the obvious outcomes of these changes are greater job opportunities and a growing usage of English as the lingua franca in the public domain. In light of this, questions are being raised as to whether it is expedient for company workers to minister among Gulf Arabs in English and/or whether it is essential to invest time, money and energy on Arabic training. Some of our colleagues would say yes to both, but would want to add qualifiers to our existing language study requirement. Others of us maintain that in order to have

effective witness among the majority of Gulf Arabs, to disciple them in their heart language and see the establishment of local churches, it is essential that we continue to equip our workers with a firm foundation in Arabic. There is also merit in promoting the study of some of the other common mother tongues spoken in the Gulf, such as Swahili, Farsi and Baluchi – but that is not the focus of this paper.

In preparation for writing this, I began to search for reactions of Gulf

Arabs towards the issue of language in globalization. Subsequently, I came across an article by a Saudi man who attempted to apply for a tourist visa to Britain. He became frustrated because the British Consulate would not accept his bank statement in Arabic and his bank wouldn't issue him one in English. He wrote,

I felt subject to strong provocation that someone was trying to tell me that even in my country, my national language is not welcome or respected and that foreign languages dominate, even when it comes to submitting a bank statement. I wish the British Embassy had shown some respect for the language of this country and accepted Arabic. I wish there were some among the embassy staff who speak and understand the language.¹

I have witnessed this frustration numerous times among women friends who return from the hospital frustrated because they couldn't communicate with the doctor or confused by the reports written in English. Sometimes they call me to come over to translate an email or text message that they don't understand. Most recently, I saw it in a junior college where students asked me to come and explain to their teachers something that they had not been

able to communicate. We have all had those frustrating moments, but few of us face them regularly within our home countries.

Another worker expressed his experience this way:

A working knowledge of conversational Arabic is very helpful with contact evangelism and initiating new friendships, especially when considering the region's demographics. The United Arab Emirates is estimated to have a population of 4.9 million in 2006 with only 20% being Emirati.² The remaining 80% are expatriate Arab, Iranian, Baluch, Asian and Western. Thus, the indigenous population is accustomed to being a minority within their own country and maintaining its cultural identity amid a myriad of other foreign cultures. As a westerner, the use of Arabic allows me to quickly open a bridge of trust between the indigenous culture and my own. Specifically, most of the national population tends to ignore the people around them until they hear a simple Arabic greeting. That greeting demands a response and initiates a conversation, which is the beginning of a relationship.

¹ Khaled Al-Sulaiman/Okaz. *English vs. Arabic*, Arab News: Wednesday 4 December 2002, <http://www.arabnews.com/services/print/print.asp?artid=20848&d=4&m=12&y=2002&hl=English%20vs.%20Arabic> (Accessed August 25, 2008).

² Library of Congress - Federal Research Division. *Country profile of the United Arab Emirates*. July 2007, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/UAE.pdf> (accessed August 28, 2008).

Motivation for learning Arabic

It bears mentioning that the process of language learning encompasses far more than just vocabulary and grammar. It gives workers an impetus to engage and bond with their new host culture. Over the years, we have seen many workers come to the region with good intentions to reach out to locals, but because they were not encouraged to study Arabic, they became overwhelmed by the language and cultural barriers and got involved with expatriate groups instead.

The greatest motivation for learning the language was expressed by another worker when he challenged us with these thoughts:

We often try to motivate people to learn another language using the language of empowerment. We talk about all the things we will be able to do with the language, as well as the advantages that will accompany this empowerment. Indeed, this is a reality. The Arabs even have a saying for this empowerment, 'He who learns the language of a people is protected from their evil.'

However, as Christians we have a higher motivating force: love. In 1 Corinthians 16:14 we are reminded, 'Let all that you do be done in love.' Earlier in chapter 13, Paul, a polyglot himself, said, 'If I speak with the languages of men and of angels, but don't have love,

I have become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal.'³

Paul was not minimizing the importance of using other languages or even the supernatural gift of tongues. Rather, he was emphasizing that the key ingredient in any communication and relationship is love. Certainly, we can demonstrate love using any language – or even without language. Yet, our tendency is to communicate love to people on our own terms and in a way that makes *us* feel loved. Language learning can perhaps be summed up as using the 'terms' of others and communicating in a way that makes *them* feel loved. It is through this relational trust that the gospel is expressed. A Bahraini believer once told us that throughout the Arab world, people make their favourite national dishes using the same basic ingredients, but each country spices it just a little differently. He said, 'When you are communicating truth to your local friends, cook it the way they like it.'

We come to these Arab lands as strangers and foreigners, separated from the people by the curse and confusion of Babel. The separation is real and profound. Historical linguistics tells us that one of the primary reasons that languages diverge is due to wilful social separation. People intentionally distinguish themselves

from other groups by modifying the way they speak or by holding on to certain peculiarities. Thus begins the fragmentation of societies according to accent, dialect and language.

Conversely, we have been given the ministry of reconciliation, so we work to break down the walls that separate us. We should not be content to just bring our knowledge of the truth; our lives should demonstrate humility as well. In contrast to our distant ancestors who built Babel through pride, we come humbly, as children, asking to be taught and

to be initiated into the world of Arabic-speaking people. In English, we come as experts, but in Arabic, we come as children. In English, we come as strangers asking Arabs to make the effort to meet us in *our* world, but in Arabic, we come as guests asking to join *their* world.

In 1 Corinthians 14:10-11, we read, 'It is true that there are all kinds of languages in the world. And they all have meaning. But if I don't understand what someone is saying, I am a stranger to that person. And that person is a stranger to me.' ⁴

Arabic in evangelism, discipleship and church planting

Language is topic dependent

In the Gulf, English is the language used in business and academia. There is also a pidgin form of English that is widely used in negotiations between diverse language groups. However, it must be noted that both a lingua franca and a pidgin language are topic dependent. In other words, though a person may be able to conduct business in English, he may not be able to talk about spiritual things in English. For example, some university students asked their professor (a worker) to describe Christian fasting. They also requested that he use Arabic for better understanding. Particularly when discussing spiritual topics, Arabic is widely considered to be the divine language. In my experience, I have found that even fluent English

speakers revert to their heart language when they converse with their family and share joy or deep sorrow. I visit one family in which all of the family members speak English fluently, yet in seven years I have never heard them speak in English with each other.

Cultural Identity

Our desire is to see entire households and tribes come to Christ. For this reason, it is important to consider that the individual that we meet in our work place represents a family and tribe of people who are anxiously trying to maintain their identity amid a continuous current of change. The good news that we share with that individual needs to be such that he can then share with his family and friends. It is implicit that we must not

alienate a new believer from his family by seemingly westernizing him. English is the language of progress and the future. Yet that 'future' is alarmingly western. At Christmas time the malls are decorated with trees and ornaments, the cinemas predominately show English films and the youth are enamoured with western icons and culture. Even the terms 'Christian' and 'westerner' are interchangeable. One proverb of the Southern Gulf says, 'There is nothing too difficult for a Christian.' This is used to assert that in less than twenty years, villages of the desert coast have been built into world-class international cities by westerners. Thus, Christianity is tied to the West even though Jesus and the early church originated here in the Middle East. By using Arabic to share the gospel, pray and quote Scripture, we can model a new way to know God within an Arabian context.

Oral language ability versus literary English

Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16, 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.'⁵ Therefore, God's written word is a key tool for discipleship and growth. It is not reasonable to assume that, even though many Gulf Arabs are conversational in English, they have the same proficiency in literary English. There have been Gulf Arabs who have come to faith in Christ through

the medium of English, but then requested discipleship and Bible studies in Arabic. Recently, I sat with a new believer and her English-speaking friend who had led her to the Lord. Although the new believer is fluent in English, I noticed that she followed along on the Arabic side of her Arabic/English Bible as her friend read in English. Another worker has emphasized the importance of Arabic Scripture memory in discipleship. Committing Bible verses to memory is essential as new believers learn to pray, worship and declare God's promises in the midst of spiritual attack. We must keep in mind that new believers from a Muslim background are not accustomed to praying and worshipping God in their own words. Just as our Lord Jesus quoted Scripture in the face of temptation, our new brothers and sisters need to stand on the authority of Scripture when they face persecution and to be equipped to give an answer for the hope that is within them.

Worship

A heart of worship is a clear indication that someone is a new creation in Christ. John 4:23, 24 says, 'Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.'⁶

⁵ *New International Version*

⁶ *New International Version*

Scripture teaches that true worship springs forth from the spirit, from deep within the soul of the believer. When the heart cries out to God, whether in song or prayer or poetry or prose, it will most likely cry out in its own tongue. We must encourage our new brothers and sisters to express themselves to God from their hearts and in their own language.

Corporate worship and church planting

Our primary purpose for being in the Gulf is to see Gulf Arabs glorify God and enjoy Him forever. We believe that there will be Saudis, Kuwaitis, Qataris, Bahrainis, Emiratis and Omanis in number worshipping around the throne of God. This side of heaven, we pray that we will see them

gather together to worship in spirit and in truth and to establish churches that will withstand certain persecution and remain through economic change. The existing expatriate churches offer us a glimpse of the vast diversity that personifies the body of Christ, but their presence in the Gulf is not secure and their styles of worship are foreign. However, the emergence of local fellowships of believers who study God's Word and worship in local dialect would diminish the perception that the new believers have left their culture and language in order to embrace a western religion. We long to see a national church planted on a firm foundation that will last until the return of Christ.

The future of company workers in the Gulf

The Arabic language continues to be an integral part of Arabian life and culture. As language learners, we have the opportunity to consecrate it to God and offer it as a love gift to our hosts. With it, we can communicate the heart of the Father to be reconciled to his children in Arabia. It offers us a means by which we stand out from the masses that have come to these countries for personal gain. In the future it may be an anchor for the local church when it enters the storms of persecution. For all of these reasons, our company has maintained its commitment to train its workers in the local language. There are many mission organiza-

tions effectively ministering in the Gulf, but to my knowledge, none of them requires its workers to commit to two years of language study. On the field we work closely together with workers from various agencies and with varied language abilities. We appreciate each other's gifting and learn from one another. As a result of our language training, our workers have been able to offer leadership in the Gulf by setting up and directing a language school, writing and teaching spiritual Arabic courses, coordinating follow-up, offering chaplaincy services to nationals in hospitals, leading church-planting teams, discipling people in Arabic, organizing outreach

and a host of other ministries. In the future, we pray that we will be used by God in an even greater capacity to help our local brothers and sisters become rooted and established in love, that they may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that

they may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. We ask this of him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. ⁷

Response 1: English can work!

by Abu Bill

Abu Bill is a colleague who studied Arabic formally. He, with his family, has lived and worked in two countries of the Gulf for almost twenty years.

God loves the diversity of languages in Arabia

The Arab world is richly diverse linguistically. In France, I met for a time with some North African believers who spoke French but not Arabic. I heard Algerians mixing French and Arabic in each sentence. In Jordan, many want to practice their English, but in the Gulf, they use English to communicate with the many expatriates (whether from India, the Philippines or elsewhere), who in most Gulf countries are in the majority.

Within each country there is a wide spectrum of diversity. Urban locals can be quite different from rural locals. There are different ethnic groups, different origins, different

home languages, different social levels, different sects and kinds of Muslims, different priorities and degrees of loyalty to various aspects of culture – of which language is a part.

Which heart language?

Some Gulf locals prefer Farsi, Baluchi or Swahili to Arabic. When our children, at age four, began attending one of the many private bilingual, English-Arabic schools for Gulf locals, they were not the only ones who were weak in Arabic! Many locals find it difficult to read Arabic. Some locals even prefer English to Arabic as a heart language! One Omani

⁷ Ephesians 3:17-21, adapted from the *New International Version*

mother at a parent-teacher meeting asked my wife what the Gulf local principal was saying in Arabic. English is prominent in the Gulf: in the work place, in the shops and even in the homes with expatriate maids. Movies and popular culture are dominated by English. Half of the population is young – many of them are being raised in English.

Many choose progress and English over tradition and Arabic

Two supreme values war in much of Arabia: progress – economic and technological development, associated with the West and the English language – and Islamic and Arabic tradition. While some try to hold on to both, and others seek a return to Islam, many vote with their feet for progress and English. English is seen as one of the most important factors in ‘getting ahead’ educationally, vocationally and materially. Most universities in the Gulf – whether they are government-run or one of the many new private universities – teach most subjects in English, not to speak of the fact that many Gulf locals study in English in universities abroad. Some Gulf families speak to their children in English, the language of youth and of the future.

In many Gulf countries, locals in the middle and upper classes send their children, from the age of four, to private bilingual schools, which teach in English half of the day and in Arabic the other half of the day; then at the age of nine or ten, these schools teach in English for eighty per cent of

the school day. Many of the western expatriate (English only) schools have Gulf locals for twenty per cent of their students. Locals who cannot afford these schools send their children to one of the many Indian-run (English only) schools. I remember once seeing students in their British school uniforms at a fast-food restaurant, male and female teenagers obviously interacting and horse playing as westerners will – then noticing as I came closer that they were Gulf locals! Some of these may find difficulties fitting in culturally (like some of our children may) – but their heart language is English.

**English is seen
as one of the most important
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educationally,
vocationally and materially.**

Some Gulf local university girls wanted to study the Bible – but their missionary lady friend didn’t get it. She tried to get them to study the Bible in Arabic, but they preferred the Bible in their heart language, English. One local young man is a driver, without much of a future. He prefers reading the Bible with his missionary friend in English – in his case, because he wants to learn the Bible and also learn English.

English can work!

Good Arabic might help a few to become insiders, but being an outsider also has its advantages. While a local might copy how an Arabic

speaker prays and teaches, a local learning in English knows he needs to adapt it to his own language and culture, in his own way. An expatriate without Arabic will not be as tempted to lead a group of converts meeting in Arabic who are looking for a leader, but will instead help one of them to lead.

Some of us, having learned French or Arabic, find we can share the gospel and worship in a second language. Likewise, a Gulf local may be able to understand and pray in English.

Christ has sent many different servants to reach Gulf locals, each with different gifts and abilities, different backgrounds and ages, different training and time commitments. Christians in expatriate churches – Indians, Filipinos, Westerners and so on – are welcoming Gulf locals to Christ (probably more than we are), even though they don't have the advantage of our training. May there be more expatriates in the Gulf, more with Arabic and also more without, who

love Christ and love Gulf locals, and who can share the Good News with them using the language of love.

**Ministries to the Arab world:
whatever it takes – even English!**

Our company is known for its depth in Arabic. May we also be known for our breadth, opening a door to those who for various reasons cannot dedicate themselves to years of full-time Arabic study, but who value our training in culture and Islamics, in missions and ministry, learning to learn and to teach in relationships of love. May we who are strong not look down on the weaker members, but give them extra honour as they fulfil their role in the Great Commission. May we have hundreds more missionaries who will make the effort to learn Arabic well. May we also have hundreds and even thousands more missionaries who will have a similar commitment to learning and ministry, using English and French to reach those they can. May Christ the Lord of the harvest be glorified as we each do our part to build His church.

**Our company is known for its
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May we also be known for our breadth,
opening a door to those who,
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Response 2: Though at times difficult to fit in, learning Arabic gives opportunity to bless in every situation

by Daniel & Maria

Daniel and Maria studied Arabic for two years at the GAP institute, and then, not finding work, they changed careers in order to be able to return to the Gulf two years later. Formerly a researcher, Daniel has been teaching in an international school in the north of the Gulf for three years. Maria is a full-time mother of two boys. Both Daniel and Maria have relationships with people in their community.

Proficiency in Arabic remains an essential tool for any sort of long-term ministry in the Gulf region. While a high proportion of the local inhabitants may have a conversational level of English – especially if they are younger and educated at an international school or have studied overseas – as soon as any in-depth conversation starts, Arabic is their preferred medium. Any kind of spiritual conversation falls into this category. Of course, in order for the message to be communicated clearly, a reasonable level of Arabic proficiency is required, and from this perspective, a two-year commitment to full-time language study will certainly provide a solid foundation for subsequent self-study or tutor-assisted learning.

However, especially in the Gulf region, the job market is increasingly competitive and workers wanting to serve here are finding that their CVs have to be of the same standard as if they were applying for positions in their home countries. In addition, an increasing number of locals are re-

turning to their own countries after studying for higher degrees abroad or gaining international experience working abroad. These people can be applying for the same type of positions as our workers are applying for. So, the effect of a two-year gap in a CV for 'full-time language/cultural study' can be significant and, from a secular point of view, can decrease the applicant's chance of success. Should we be more relaxed about the length of full-time language study on which we insist, and allow field leaders to judge individual cases on their own merits? What happens if a suitable job opening is found in the second year of language study, for example? Although a two-year study period will provide a solid foundation in Arabic, if a job is found and the worker has to move to another country, there will be a frustrating period of adjustment to a local spoken dialect – how long depends on the amount of time the job allows for him or her to concentrate on this. This may argue for a worker to find a position first, and then when he is in the country, to find some way to

study the language. However, this will obviously not be as efficient as a period of full-time study.

Our personal experience has been that, whatever the drawbacks, the time we spent studying Arabic full-time was time well spent, and it provided us with invaluable insights into and experiences of local culture, customs and traditions. At present, our ability to communicate in the local language quickly distinguishes us from the other western expatriates living here, and the ignorance or blatant disregard for local culture with which they are associated. Given the large numbers of expats working here in comparison to the number of local inhabitants, this is not an insignificant advantage. Other fellow-workers have served here without knowing Arabic and have made many significant relationships

with local friends. However, most of them felt frustrated at the limitations that a lack of Arabic placed on their ministry and so made attempts at learning it. Some of them also made huge cultural blunders that could easily have been avoided had they spent time learning the language somewhere in the region.

The ability to speak Arabic provides the opportunity to 'be a blessing in every situation'. Waiting in queues for official forms to be stamped, waiting for food to be cooked, trying to sort out bureaucratic problems in government offices or waiting to be served in a busy shop can all be transformed into times when we can share with people and show them something of the character of Christ - even if it is just a pleasant smile and a genuine thanks to a bored employee in a government ministry office.

**Our personal experience has been that,
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customs and traditions.**

Language in the UK Diaspora, or What Colour is a Zebra?

by HJ

H leads the AWM ministry to Muslims in the UK. He and J, with their family, spent almost a decade in Morocco, and then worked in the UK office in promotion before taking on their current leadership role for the diaspora ministry in the UK.

Do we need Arabic to work with Arab world Muslims in the UK? Well, you know the story. You get two people up really close to a zebra. One says 'It's black'; the other is sure it's white. You need to step back a bit to get a clearer picture. So trying to step back a bit from ministry in the UK, what do we see?

Populations

We meet at least four separate groups:

- **Immigrants.** They have been here from zero to forty years. Some were born here and have been through a complete British education. Others just stepped off a plane.
- **Students.** Mostly they are here for a three-year university course and have good levels of English. Some come for two to six months to learn English.
- **Asylum seekers.** Many did not expect to be in Britain. They have made few plans, and learned little language ahead of time. Many will only stay for under two

years before being required to return home.

- **Tourists.** London is a major destination for Arab world holiday makers.

In comparing these groups with 'typical' residents of their home country, we need to apply at least two extra analytical grids:

Cultural grid

Clearly, Arab world cultures are nowhere near homogenous. Of particular note for us are the differences caused by affluence and level of education. But whatever their starting culture, when Arab world Muslims arrive in the UK, they begin a process of cultural adaptation. Some integrate much more quickly than others. Some, often for religious or ethnic reasons, integrate very slowly. Often, these groups, when confronted by unhidden moral corruption in society, prefer to withdraw in order to protect themselves and their children. Even so, over time their society adapts to British culture. Their perception of the 'home' culture tends to fossilize, reflecting the way things were at home years ago. Under-

standing and adapting to their culture, even with no Arabic language, will greatly help in building relationships with them.

Language grid

Language adaptation does not always parallel cultural adaptation, but they trend in similar directions. Some have reasonable English when they arrive. Others have none. Some communities – notably the Yemenis, and to some degree, the Moroccans – have set up their own businesses and work within Arabic-speaking ghettos. Brides are brought from ‘home’, since you can’t be confident that a girl growing up in the morally loose West will be a virgin. The new brides have no English and sometimes are prevented from attending classes. Rather, they are kept at home to avoid being corrupted.

Added to these two grids, we have the very significant presence of the British church. Christians are meeting Arabs from day to day. Very few Christians with secular jobs can be expected to learn Arabic, but they are involved (if only it were more!) in outreach.

Language needs for workers

Therefore, given a diverse population from across the Arab world, as well as the varying levels of cultural adaptation and language proficiency, what level of Arabic do workers need in the UK?

Those Arabs who have just arrived, either as immigrants or asylum seekers, may have very little English. Yet this group is often the most receptive to the gospel. They are not ghettoised and are still open to new ideas. Their lives are facing change. Some have come from situations of real danger because of their opposition to an Islamic government, and this has led to a questioning of Islam. Such people need loving care, and here the UK church has done good work. But language is a real barrier and *Arabic speakers are vital*.

Very few Arabs who arrive in the UK as adults ever really get to the point of English being their heart language. Reading skills, especially, may be limited. While discussions can be held in English, there is less emotional pull towards a truth presented in it.

For children educated in Britain, however, the opposite is true. They may speak Arabic, but they do not read it well, if at all. Their parents’ ‘home’ country is not theirs – they identify themselves as British. *Children’s work not only **can** be done, it is **best** done in English.*

The hidden signals

Immigrant communities live under a degree of threat, and they feel alien. There is a specialist role for speakers of Arabic here. They are greeted as friends, the language signifying a shared identity. Westerners who speak Arabic validate that identity, and their language skill carries the

hidden message: 'We appreciate, value and are prepared to expend effort to serve you'. Where a distinctive dialect is spoken (for example, Moroccan), the bond is especially strong.

What level of Arabic?

There are three very distinct levels of language that count:

- An ability to greet, ask a few simple questions, and give a little information (level 0+ on the language grid). This gains workers an acceptance as those who have troubled to learn something of the culture. No significant conversations will take place in Arabic at this level. But a bond is there, especially if the worker has visited the home country of the Arab friend.
- An ability to hold spiritual conversations (level 3 on the language grid). Here, the proficiency is such that ministry can be conducted in Arabic. Workers who have

achieved such a level are unlikely to lose their Arabic even if opportunities to practise are in short supply for a period.

- Native speakers (level 5 on the grid). They are accepted as Arabs.

Moving from level 0+ to level 3 takes most workers at least two years – maybe quite a bit longer. Is it worth the effort to do this? In an ideal world, I believe a healthy team in the UK needs to have a mix of people. Although friendship is not always transferable, friends can often, with care, be passed on. A friendship begun in limited English can be continued by another worker in fluent Arabic. The ideal team would, therefore, mix some with level 0+ in Arabic, some with level 3 and some native speakers. So whether you are working with the white part or the black part of the zebra, you can have significant ministry. And if your skills do not match what is needed, you can pass your friend on to a worker of a different stripe.

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PART 3: BETTER UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNICATING WITH MUSLIMS

A Muslim-Christian Dialogue on the Role of Works in Salvation

by Dale Martin

Dale Martin is the Director of Ministry and Training for Arab World Ministries in the USA, the Academic Director of the Summer Institute on Islam training programme and does adjunct teaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

One principle of effective witness to Muslims is listening to them and allowing them to identify the issues that they find important in the discussion. It is then up to us to present to them our biblical understanding in those areas. At a recent dialogue meeting between Muslims and Christians on the topic of salvation, the role of works became central in the discussion. The two main objections expressed by the Muslims centred upon the apparent lack of works necessary for salvation in Christianity and the *carte blanche* Christians seem to have for sin in their lives after conversion. In Christianity, the easy grace of God for the believer appeared to these Muslims as a license or excuse for sinning since sin can be so easily forgiven without working for that forgiveness. They found this principle to be incongruent with Islam and could not accept it as an expression of authentic biblical Christianity. After listening to their objections, we presented the following comparison that clearly portrays the role of works in salvation and shows them that the grace of God is not an automatic excuse for

Christians to sin without concern for the consequences.

Both the Muslims and the Christians present agreed on the following formulation for the role of works:

ISLAM

Faith + Works + Allah's Mercy =
Salvation

CHRISTIANITY

Faith + Grace =
Salvation + Works

In Islam, the combination of three things results in salvation: the faith of the believer, the works or deeds of the believer and Allah's mercy at the point of judgment. In Christianity, works have their place on the other side of the equation. For the Muslim, works *lead to* salvation but for the Christian, works *grow out of* salvation as a response to the grace one has received from God. Quoting from Romans 3:28, we explained that we are justified by faith 'apart from observing the law.' Citing verses from the book of James, we contended

that works would be demonstrated in the life of the believer as a normal consequence of regeneration.¹ James even states that someone who claims to be saved but does not demonstrate a changed life has a dead faith.² Thus, that works would be demonstrated in the life of the believer as a normal consequence of

regeneration.¹ James even states that someone who claims to be saved but does not demonstrate a changed life has a dead faith.² Thus, works are an evidence of authentic conversion and accompany it, even though they play no role in earning our justification in any way. Salvation plus works must appear together in the believer's life as an authentic sign that the faith plus grace on the other side of the equation is genuine. Works can also be understood as acts of obedience that are done because of a genuine faith and as evidence of our submission to the will of God.³

Our Muslim friends were also able to see that the Christian does not have blanket permission for sinning at will, as this would call into question the veracity of his salvation as well as his or her submission to God.

By means of this formulation, the Muslims present were able to see that works are taken seriously and have an important role in Christianity since they are an outcome and the evidence of salvation and submission to God. Our Muslim friends were also able to see that the Christian does not have blanket permission for

sinning at will, as this would call into question the veracity of the person's salvation as well as his or her submission to God. For the Christian, works – as

the sign of an authentic conversion – also lead to assurance of salvation, which is absent in Islam, except for martyrs who die in battle defending Islam. Islam teaches that only at the point of Allah's judgment can a Muslim know if he or she has been accorded salvation. Recent studies of former Muslims demonstrate that assurance of salvation was highly influential in their coming to faith in

1 James 2:17: 'Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.' James 2:26: 'For as the body apart from the spirit is dead.' *English Standard Version, Crossway Bibles* (Wheaton IL: Good News Publishers, 2001) p. 1216.

2 James 2:22: 'You see that faith was active along with works, and faith was completed by his works.' James 2:24: 'You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.'

3 This of course needs to be distinguished carefully from an empty legalistic practice of works that is done out of self-righteousness and not genuine faith.

4 J. Dudley Woodberry, Russell G. Shubin and G. Marks, 'Why Muslims Follow Jesus: The results of a recent survey of converts from Islam', *Christianity Today*, October 2007, Vol. 51, No. 10

Christ.⁴ Therefore, a biblical theology of works as the evidence and assurance of salvation in the believer's life may be very attractive to Muslims who are seeking to understand and compare their faith to ours.

Much of the Muslim's misunderstanding on this point may be the result of contact with nominal Christianity and our western style of extremely informal practice of 'lifestyle' faith.⁵ A more formal and ritualized practice of Christianity would be more attractive to many Muslim seekers than what they see as the loose and careless, informal Christian practice of most westerners. Viewing us through their Islamic framework, they often equate this with a lack of commitment and dedication on our part, and call into question the authenticity of the Christian faith, reinforcing their view that Islam was given to replace and update a corrupted Christianity.

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Our dialogue with Muslims has forced us to clarify our theology of works. The biblical emphasis we place on faith and grace in salvation is certainly appropriate. However, it is not helpful when it means that the role of works in the life of the believer is ignored or becomes extinguished in our theology

or praxis. For Muslims, this appears to be a central issue, and they need to see how the role of works is affirmed in Christianity. The principle of cultural congruence applies here – that things are more acceptable

when they are similar to what we already know in our own culture. It suggests that Christianity will be attractive to Muslims when they are able to observe a large degree of similarity between what they already believe and what they perceive to be our beliefs and practices.⁶ Therefore, it is essential that we clearly understand the role of works and that we are able to communicate this well to Muslims in a way that helps them take Christianity seriously.

5 Muslims are encountering what Keener has so aptly stated: 'a common modern conception that faith is a once-for-all prayer involving no commitment of life or purpose and is efficacious even if quickly forgotten.' Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (IVPress, Downer's Grove, 1993) p. 696.

6 David Greenlee (ed) *From the Straight Path to the Narrow Way* (Authentic Media, Waynesboro, GA, USA, 2005) p. 44.

A Sunni Woman's Heart

Part 2: A Need to Belong

by Tahira

The author, a Westerner, has lived in the Middle East with her family for nearly twenty years, residing in a variety of neighbourhoods and engaging in a variety of ministries. The following article is based on research she conducted for a doctorate in Intercultural Studies.

Everyone needs to belong. Humans are social beings. Yet the Protestant emphasis on an individual, personal faith sometimes leads workers to ignore the importance of social relationships and group identity for their ministries. I discovered that a Sunni woman's need to belong creates enormous obstacles to faith in Jesus. What might we do to help her find her identity in the Body of Christ?

Barriers

All of the women I studied consider being Sunni Muslim a very important part of their identity. Being Sunni determines in part their reputation, legal standing, job prospects, family structure, social network, major holidays, political expectations and area of residence. Bitter memo-

ries of past conflicts with other groups defined by religious identity (*tawa'if*)¹ are passed on from generation to generation, ensuring that Sunnis continue to be unified around feelings of victimization, resentment,

revenge, self-righteousness and alienation.² Stereotypes of non-Sunnis abound.

In this context, leaving Sunni Islam is deemed political and social treachery to family, community and religion. Evangelism is seen as an attack on the Sunni Muslim community. The associa-

tion in Sunni Muslims' minds between Zionism and Evangelical Christianity intensifies the Muslim tendency toward revulsion. In light of the threat to their sense of identity and social networks, it is small wonder that Sunni Muslim women so

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1 Tawa'if (singular: Ta'ifa) are sectarian divisions which determine a family's political and religious status.

2 This is equally true of other religious groups in this nation.

often reject the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus.

From childhood, people from my focus group have been inculcated with the notion that they are privileged to have been born into a superior religion and to belong to a great *Umma* with a glorious past and future. They share with the people closest to them the meanings and feelings associated with certain history, symbols, heroes, stories, special times and places, common rituals, dress and behaviours. Whatever their theology, their working heavenly hope includes nearness to family and a continued sense of belonging in the Islamic *Umma*. For many, these ties are so precious that nothing may be contemplated which threatens them.³

Women in Middle Eastern society need to belong to a family. A respectable woman lives with her husband or a near relative, preferably male. A Muslim woman who wishes to keep her reputation must marry a Muslim or remain single, living with family members. Some believers of Muslim backgrounds who have chosen not to change their legal religious identity have been able to remain at home, but it is difficult for them to enjoy home life when foundational loyalties do not coincide, and there is constant pressure to return to

thorough-going Islamic belief and practice. A married Muslim woman who converts risks losing her marriage and children. Again, the high social cost of following Jesus may hinder some from being willing to listen to what the Master has to say.

A Sunni woman may avoid questioning Islamic beliefs and standards due to a sense of loyalty to the spiritual wellbeing of her dear ones. Pious mothers sense the responsibility of creating a wholesome Muslim environment in the home. A Muslim who might otherwise be a seeker fears that her spiritual search is a moral weakness, which could result in her husband or family losing merits. Unless she is a good Muslim, she will not be able to intercede effectively for them, and if she leaves Islam, their intercessions for her will avail nothing.

Not only are there barriers to leaving the fold of Islam, there are also barriers to entering the Christian community. Some of the negative stereotypes Muslims have toward Christians have a basis in fact, and a seeker or believers of a Muslim background may feel revulsion at some 'Christian' practices. In the minds of many Lebanese Muslims, Protestant Christians are pro-Zionist, friends of the archenemies, the Jews. Contemporary life is busy

3 Furthermore, the Muslim community teaches that only the weaklings leave Islam, those who are ignorant or subject to temptation.

and pressured, and profound relationships are hard to build. Even local Christians acknowledge that relationships within the Christian community are shallow and not adequate to compensate believers of Muslim backgrounds for the damage they experience to a sense of belonging within the family and Sunni community.

Bridges

We all belong to a common humanity, and the things that unite us far exceed those which divide. Women workers share many experiences and circumstances with Sunni women as females, including menstruation, wanting to marry, marriage, childbirth and child rearing, and the pressure of societal expectations upon women. Even resident foreigners share with women of this segment of society the frustrations, delights and fears of life. We are all sensitive to the need to show mutual tolerance and respect for the sake of national and global survival. We are monotheists and share some key foundational stories: Creation, Noah, Abraham, and the exodus from Egypt. There are many issues of morality, which we can address with one voice. Any

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of these common elements of life can build bridges, however tenuous, that span the chasms between religious groups (*tawa'if*) and allow greater communication to take place.

There are also potential theological bridges. The Islam of my focus group stresses that the individual ultimately stands alone before God, and that no intercession of dear ones will save them from the Fire.⁴ This truth might

serve as a caveat against giving total loyalty to a human community. Both communities honour people who have rejected their family's religion while remaining re-

spectful, who recognized that obeying the call of God was more important than family tradition, acceptance and protection. Reminding Muslims of these people's courage may help them to find the courage to respond to the call of God in Christ. Abraham is one example with profound religious significance (See Joshua 24:2 and Genesis 11:26-32).

Fault Lines

The women I studied believe that they belong to a superior, elect and

4 Although this is the official view, in practice there is a great deal of intercession for deceased relatives and allegedly atoning rituals such as reciting the Fatiha 10,000 times on another's behalf. A friend points out that most of the taps at ablutions stations in mosques are donated in the name of a particular person, and the worshipper who washes there is expected to say a prayer on behalf of the donor.

privileged group, with the right to enforce their (or as they see it, God's) norms on others and to defend themselves with violence. At the same time, they want to see themselves and their community as tolerant, reasonable and just. At times I sensed that they were aware of this inconsistency and distressed by it. Further, they share the tension that all thoughtful citizens experience between the loyalty to the religious group, which is ruining the country, and loyalty to the country, which might be costly to the religious group. There is a tacit recognition that bitter divisions need something more powerful than *shari'ah* (Islamic law) to heal them. Weak though it seems, the ethical teaching of Jesus might indeed prove the only solution.

Frustration with the Muslim community to which a woman belongs results in inner wrestling. The sense of belonging the women feel in the Muslim community, though very positive in many ways, carries with it a powerful sense of responsibility and pressure. A woman not otherwise open to Christian teaching might be attracted to truths that relieve her of burdens she feels she cannot bear or of unfair expectations and restrictions. Finally, although these women might not admit it to outsiders, they are regularly disappointed by the disunity, ungodly character and

flawed behaviours of the Muslim families, communities and *Umma* to which they tie their identity.⁵ The result could be weakened loyalties or profound doubts, opportunities for the Holy Spirit to redirect the individual's sense of belonging toward the Father.

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Worthy of Observation

It is worth investing extra effort in people whose commitment to righteousness exceeds their commitment to religious, political, ethnic and clan groupings. One experienced worker in Syria has devised a simple gauge of relative commitment. He uses three tea glasses, one each to represent Muslims, Christians and Jews. Pointing to each glass in turn, he then asserts 'In this glass are people whose actions please God, and there are those whose actions are evil.' He

5 Of course, the same is true for members of all the religious groups, or *tawa'if*.

6 A Muslim friend explains that this is because of the belief in a kind of purgatory through which even the most wicked of Muslims will eventually reach heaven. No such hope is imagined for the Jew.

claims a greater openness to the Gospel among those willing to concede that some righteous Jews are better than some wicked Muslims.⁶ Another indicator might be commitment to some single aspect of righteousness and willingness to work across religious group boundaries to promote it.⁷ It would also be well to explore the sense of admiration some Muslims have for prominent Christians, like Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II, who showed love to people of other religions. A willingness to express appreciation for such heroes shows a love of godliness and may indicate a window of opportunity to connect their behaviour with the salvation they have experienced through Christ.⁸

**Just telling
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Another group of people to look for are those who are dismayed by or alienated from the Muslim group to which they have belonged. Although it is not especially strategic to found a church with malcontents, rebels and social isolates, God may have cut the social bonds of these individuals in order to make them more receptive to the acceptance of God in Christ.

Missional Strategies

It is hard to imagine that any woman from this subculture would be willing to risk alienation from the family and community to which she is so closely bound without being thoroughly convinced of the abundant love and acceptance of God. Appropriate teaching might focus on the immanence of God: his gracious Fatherhood, his nearness to his people in heaven, his acceptance of

those who fail in their worship, the proof of his love in the Incarnation and the cross, and the saving intercession of Jesus. Just telling a woman that God loves her is not enough; she must experience that love, normally first from a believer or believing community and decisively through personal experience of Jesus.

Some groups of Christians are doing a good job in embracing Muslim-heritage believers. Many could do much better. The need of Sunni Muslim women (and, I believe, of all people) to belong to a community demands from the missional church a more profound ecclesiology, along with a corresponding change in congregational relationships, an improvement

⁷ Examples might include peacemaking, sexual morality, human rights or stewardship of the environment.

⁸ It may be, however, that many Muslims would assume the motive behind these admirable deeds to be the acquisition of merit.

in the integration and discipleship of believers of a Muslim background and a reconsideration of strategies for evangelism.

In terms of theology, the church must learn an ecclesiology that is not primarily based on bloodlines and political classification. I recommend an organic model of

church, with a special focus on the church as the family of God. The practice of informal meetings and visits in homes would be in keeping with this theology. Social gatherings involving food and fun commu-

nicate that the church has accepted the whole person and not just her spiritual component. Much more could be done to help the church appreciate the profound communal symbolism of baptism and communion. It is unlikely that a heterogeneous church can thrive until the current, fairly homogeneous congregations deal with their chronic problems of backbiting, fear of change, divisiveness and clannishness.

The church should monitor itself to ensure that believers from Muslim families are truly accepted and taking leadership roles within the body

of Christ. Giving gifted and mature Muslim-background believers the responsibility of discipling people of all backgrounds would enhance understanding within the church over time. Christian-background church leaders should learn all they can from Muslim brothers and sis-

ters in Christ, and especially from those who most successfully deal with the tension between devotion to Christ and respect for their community of origin. Believers from a Christian background should be trained through

mentoring and other forms of instruction to be sensitive to Muslims in speech and behaviour.⁹ Prejudicial comments against Muslims should be countered, even in private conversations between people of Christian backgrounds. At every level, from kids' clubs to seminary, there is a need for a re-evaluation of the church's curricula to ensure that the questions of believers and seekers from all backgrounds are being adequately addressed.

Believers from non-Christian families may need special help in being oriented to

The church should monitor itself to ensure that believers from Muslim families are truly accepted and taking leadership roles within the body of Christ.

9 Here are a few of the specific suggestions made to me about sensitivity: women wearing head coverings in church, sitting with dignity and respect in church, solid Bible teaching and modesty in dress. It would also be beneficial to ask how the church's style of music enhances or detracts from the ability to participate in heartfelt worship.

the Bible and Christian history, stories, theology, customs and traditions, but they should be given the freedom to question what they hear in light of the teachings of Scripture. They also may appreciate the offer of inclusion in family-oriented holidays like Christmas.

Since few churches are at present ready to integrate believers from Muslim backgrounds, those discipling them would do well to consider alternatives that meet the person's need to belong, such as small group discipleship and worship groups. From the start, the evangelist should seek to build positive and honest relationships with whole families whenever possible, and no attempt should be made to alienate the seeker or new believer from her family and community. However, some negative family reaction is almost inevitable. Wise Christian leaders have at times been able to act as peacemakers and to reconcile estranged new believers with their families. Teenagers and young adults need special assistance in learning to balance their right to freedom of religious choice with genuine gratitude, respect and humility toward their parents.

Very few Sunni women are willing even to consider the good news of Jesus, in part because it is a threat to their social identity. To win the opportunity of presenting the Gospel, some obvious first steps might include building common ground, appealing to society's urgent need for inter-religious understanding, showing persistent love in practical ways, initiating or joining secular and cross-religious organizations and acting as peace-makers at all levels. Some Muslim women are open to practical instruction on relationships from a Christian perspective, provided that it is not blatantly anti-Muslim, and some might attend a public lecture or a ladies' discussion group on such a subject.¹⁰ While many women of this subculture consider the ethical teachings of Jesus unworkable, many also recognize that Jesus presented lofty ideals to which a pious person should aspire. With the illumination of the Spirit, his teachings might lead a Muslim woman to sense the truth and beauty of his words and character, her own inadequacy, and her need for the kind of gracious acceptance Jesus offers.

10 Some topics might include family unity, overcoming resentment, resolving sectarian hostility and cross-generational conflict. A neutral venue would make such a prospect more inviting.

PART 4: BOOK REVIEWS

THE MESSENGER, THE MESSAGE AND THE COMMUNITY: Three Critical Issues for the Cross-cultural Church-planter

Roland Muller (pseudonym). Published by CanBooks, 2006. 394 pages.

Available from Fellowship of Faith for Muslims [www.ffmpegna.org]. The book is currently out of print but available on a CD from <http://rmuller.com>.

‘This is the best book I’ve read on evangelism among Muslims. Roland understands us!’ exclaimed a believer from a Muslim background (BMB) from Washington State who intentionally went to Vancouver Missionfest to meet the author of *Tools for Muslim Evangelism*. Most of its contents are now included in this new book. Roland echoes how some of us felt when we first started in cross-cultural ministries. He writes, ‘When I first arrived in the Middle East in the late 1970s, I started asking, “How do I do it?” No one seemed to have any concrete answers. There was no one to point to and say, “They know how to do it!” Consequently, each new missionary developed his own approach by trial and error, often with more error than success.’ Not only in this section but throughout the whole book, Roland shares useful insights he has gained and observed in pursuing his research and ministry.

In this review, I will focus on four helpful themes that particularly apply to my ministry to Muslims and believers from Muslim backgrounds.

I. Teacher-based evangelism

The chapter on ‘Teacher-Based Evangelism’ is my favourite. Roland addresses the difference between friendship evangelism and teacher-based evangelism. In the East, friendships are lifelong commitments. What few of us understood at the beginning of our cross-cultural experience was that authentic and mutual friendships like these are not easy to develop and the expectations from a friend are much greater than in typical western friendships. Roland discusses some of the pitfalls in making ‘friendship evangelism’ our primary strategy. For example, we may delay sharing the gospel or initiating a spiritual discussion lest it terminates the relationship. Many find that friendship evangelism fits hand in hand with the modern concept of tentmaking. Tentmakers may be cautious about projecting themselves as trained religious workers/teachers and adopt a secular identity in the community.

On the other hand, Roland states that ‘in every case the successful evangelists had the reputation in their own communities of being

spiritual people, men and women of God.’ He observes that even non-Christian neighbours knew where to go, or direct others, to address questions about spiritual matters. I was challenged with the idea that in teacher-based evangelism, evangelists have an agenda when dealing with Muslims; otherwise Muslims will try to impose their agenda on us.

2. Dealing with the two faces of a believer

Eastern cultures and Islam allow and sometimes encourage duplicity. So a very relevant topic in discipleship of a BMB is the matter of the two worlds that a new convert lives in or, as stated in the book, he develops two faces. On the one hand, the new believer welcomes Christianity, fellowship, Bible teaching, etc. but on the other hand, he lives in his community with parents, relatives, spouse and children and may even pretend to be a good Muslim. As he continues living in two worlds, he is left with great tension. This may even lead to mental instability. With the work of the Holy Spirit and help from a wise discipler, the new believer learns how to integrate the two worlds and finds freedom in Christ.

3. Going beyond a guilt/innocent paradigm

Roland points out that between the first two and the last two chapters of the Bible all of humanity lives under the influence of and is tainted by sin. ‘The only reason that the Christian missionary enterprise exists today is

because sin exists.’ Roland comments that missionaries, who know that the cure for sin is ultimately found in Jesus Christ, have neglected to spend much time unwrapping sin’s effects.

In short, during Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden, they experienced guilt or conscience for the first time. They never felt shame and fear before. Being evicted from the Garden added to their shame. Muller assists us in understanding how to share the gospel message with people living under world views that have a strong focus on *shame*, *fear* as well as *guilt*. Roland points out that no one world view is better than another because all are trying to negate sin’s effects. He insists that the Bible speaks to all cultures and world views. If we dig deep enough, humanity is affected in all three areas: shame, fear and guilt. Writers of the New Testament were influenced by the Roman culture and law. Early church fathers like Tertullian and Augustine developed theologies based on guilt and righteousness. Roland says that, ‘The danger comes when we Westerners take our Roman understanding of the Gospel and apply it to those who do not have a Roman-based culture.’

Many of us, when first immersed in the shame-based world view of the Muslim world, learned very quickly how honour and shame permeate society. Honour is viewed as the biggest asset in the East and it is not easily restored once lost. In Christ, we have many illustrations of how

God ‘raises mankind from a position of shame to the ultimately honourable position of joint-heirs with Christ.’

Western evangelicals often struggle with the role of the supernatural. We may fail to understand or even question the validity of curses, power encounters, dreams and visions in the life of a Muslim seeker or BMB. Yet, this dimension of life is ‘real’ for many non-western seekers and believers. While these issues are not fully addressed in this book, principles are laid down for opening up ministry to satisfy these deep needs.

4. Developing wholesome communities where BMBs fit

In the last section of this book, Roland explores the subject of the importance of biblical community. He observes that sometimes new workers are more confident than the experienced workers about how to do church planting and form community. He rightfully observes that the new church-planter should be conscious of the community he envisions, even before evangelism is initiated.

Westerners may be strong in attempting to contextualize their message but they are often weak in creating an alternative community for new believers. A new brother or sister will struggle to leave a close-knit *Umma* and be afraid of feeling isolated in a new community. This affects how discipleship takes place – at times, the new believer may just want to hang out with his new friends or in a Christian home.

The whole matter of belonging is important to Eastern communities – much more so than in the West. In the East, bonding and closeness are very important.

‘The Bible encourages us to build communities of believers, where “nearness” is based on faith in Christ rather than blood relations’ (p. 273). Western Christians subconsciously accept that evangelism moves on a continuum to discipleship and finally to joining a Christian community. ‘In many cases, the non-Western seeker will want the question of community to be dealt with first, or at least alongside that of personal faith’ (p. 351). The process is sometimes reversed to Community (belonging), Discipleship (exploring) and then Evangelism (accepting). Here we have a case of pre-evangelism discipleship! We have to allow for the seeker sitting among us to ‘sniff’ out this new community before he moves on to a decision.

Concluding Comments

I highly recommend this book with its trilogy of significant topics (the messenger, the message and the community) for all who are beginning a cross-cultural ministry to Muslims and BMBs. Pertinent questions for reflection and discussion at the end of each chapter also help make this book a good refresher for experienced practitioners. Roland shares best practices in Muslim evangelism and discipleship gleaned from years of his own and others’

ministries. I believe the application of the principles highlighted in this book will accelerate a new worker's effectiveness.

I see a couple of slight weaknesses in this book. First, Roland Muller interjects thoughts for evangelists involved with people from other faiths and cultures besides Islam and the East. It would have been less disruptive to retain its original flavour or focus on reaching Muslims. Secondly, the section dealing with fear-power

paradigm is brief and incomplete in light of it being a dominant concern for many Muslims, especially women.

After reading Roland's book, we need to ask, 'How can I grow in these three critical issues in the ministry I am part of?' The western church knows how to nurture church planters for western society but is lacking in its ability to develop cross-cultural evangelists and church planters. This book is a valuable resource.

reviewed by Ed Loewen

Ed directs AWM Canada's outreach to Muslims, and, along with his wife, he has been involved in ministry to Muslims for his entire adult life – first in Pakistan and then in Canada.

GRACE FOR MUSLIMS? THE JOURNEY FROM FEAR TO FAITH

Steve Bell (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2006).

While not offering any insights that are substantially new to the subject of how to reach Muslims in western societies, Steve Bell, the author of *Grace for Muslims*, needs to be listened to, nevertheless. He served in the Middle East for over a decade with the express purpose of sharing faith with Muslims, was the director of Action Partners Ministries (formerly Sudan United Mission) and is presently the UK Director of InterServe.

It is not his intention in this book to reveal the emotions and value struggles we often associate with reverse

culture shock, but it is evident that Steve has more affinity for Arab culture than for his own British culture, and that he experienced a clash of values that became most pronounced when he returned to the UK after many years of service in Egypt. Not surprisingly, his empathy towards Muslims shines through as he encourages Christians to extend grace to them by starting with building genuine friendships with those who misunderstand and are misunderstood in the Arab diaspora. I like the point he makes with regard to establishing friendships as a starting point in evangelism: 'What is

widely understood as “friendship evangelism” is not really evangelism at all but simply the means for developing a healthy context for evangelism” (p. 166).

Written in a non-scholarly fashion by someone who is well-read and experienced, Steve’s book is ideal for giving to British or other Western Christians who are trying to figure out how to break through to their Muslim neighbours or colleagues. For instance, he shows how the Qur’an can be used in building bridges in the chapter ‘Echoes of Grace’.

reviewed by David Lundy

His chapter on eleven reasons why Christians should extend grace to Muslims gave me a couple of fresh ideas of how to impart vision to churches I speak in about their responsibility to make sure that Muslims are not forgotten in their mission mandate. Bell’s well-documented contention that God is at work among Muslims today as never before will stir your heart, even as it will help get people reaching out to the diaspora at their doorstep.

SURPRISED BY HOPE: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church

N. T. Wright (New York: HarperOne, 2008) 332 pages.

Why review a book like this one, written to convince Christians that they have gotten much of their core *theology* wrong and to show them the right way to *think*, in *Seedbed*? Isn’t *Seedbed* all about practical issues and discussing the day-to-day challenges of our ministry in the Arab world? One of the topics that *Seedbed* recently dealt with was the interconnection between church planting and transformational ministry. For much of my adult life, I have wrestled with this question. A recent edition of the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* (2008, 25:2) was devoted to this topic and was

entitled *Word and Deed: A Century of Polarization?* The title suggests that I have not been alone in my struggle to find resolution of the tensions when we try to bring together an emphasis on church planting with one on transformational ministry within the same ministry organization. I believe that the resurrection-based understanding that Wright presents in *Surprised by Hope* offers a sound biblical way to understand and overcome the tensions between ‘word and deed’ that many of us have wrestled with for so long.

Writing in a forceful and persuasive style, world-renowned New Testament scholar and Anglican Bishop N. T. Wright argues that the main reasons that so many of us have struggled with the practical dualism of *either* focusing on 'spiritual' work, *or* focusing on social and justice issues is that we have an unbiblical dualism implicit in our understanding of salvation and of God's intended future for the church and the earth. In *Surprised by Hope*, Wright seeks to demonstrate that modern evangelicalism, along with many other branches of the contemporary church, has fallen into much serious error in its understanding of what the Bible teaches that God accomplished in Christ through his life, death, resurrection and ascension.

Wright argues that far too many Christians have succumbed to an almost platonic dualism in how they understand salvation. He states strongly that:

The normal Western Christian view: that salvation is about 'my relationship with God' in the present and about 'going home to God and finding peace' in the future.... is simply not what the New Testament teaches (p. 196).

Instead, he says that, 'salvation, then, is not 'going to heaven' but 'being raised to life in God's new heaven and new earth' (p. 198).

Wright shows that what we believe about the resurrection and ascension of Jesus is *core to our entire theology*, which in turn influences what we

believe about *everything else*. Wright believes that it is because we have departed so far from the New Testament and classic Christian understanding of the resurrection that we have gone so far wrong in our understanding of the mission of the church in this present era. The theological dualism that we have unwittingly adopted is the source of the practical dualism we experience in our understanding of the mission priority of the church.

In *Surprised by Hope*, Wright covers a lot of ground. He begins setting the scene by showing how distant much typical Christian understanding of the resurrection and the hoped-for future is from the belief of the NT and early Christian centuries (Part 1: Setting the Scene, pp. 1-76). Then he carefully demonstrates the proper biblical, and especially New Testament, understanding of our future hope, of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, of heaven, of the new creation, of Jesus' return, of the redemption of our bodies and of paradise and hell (Part 2: God's Future Plan, pp. 77-186). In his third and final section, Wright explores a number of significant ways that a properly *biblical* understanding of our future hope should reshape our understanding of salvation, of the Kingdom of God and of the mission of the church, as seen in the New Testament, and how it ought to shape our practice in the twenty-first century (Part 3: Hope in Practice: Resurrection and the Mission of the Church, pp. 187-289).

As I read *Surprised by Hope*, I was surprised to find myself whole-heartedly agreeing with his affirmations, even as he repeatedly demolished some of my long-held convictions about the nature of salvation and the future that God has planned for his people and the earth that he created. I will need to read it more than once in order to be truly shaken free from much of what I have previously embraced as biblical truths. Rereading *Surprised by Hope* will help me change my thinking **and** my practice so that it lines up more closely with the understanding that Jesus and the Apostles had. This perspective, which is so radically different from so many contemporary Christian perspectives, empowered the Apostles, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to turn the world upside down within a few generations.

I encourage everyone to buy and read this book. Wright's style of writing is easy. This is not a book written for academic theologians (although they would do well to read

it!). It is written for everyone who desires to live their life in obedience to Christ in our generation. Let me give Wright the last word:

I hope I have said enough to make it clear that the mission of the church is nothing more or less than the outworking, in the power of the Spirit, of Jesus' bodily resurrection and thus the anticipation of the time when God will fill the earth with his glory, transform the old heavens and earth into the new, and raise his children from the dead to populate and rule over the redeemed world he has made.

If that is so, mission must urgently recover from its long-term schizophrenia. As I have said before, the split between saving souls and doing good in the world is a product not of the Bible or the gospel but of the cultural captivity of both within the Western world....

When the church is living out the kingdom of God, the word of God will spread powerfully and do its own work (pp. 264-265 & 267).

reviewed by Don Little

You can be part of the ongoing **Seedbed** conversation . . .

Helped by feedback from dozens of colleagues, I have chosen the following themes for **Seedbed** in 2009 & 2010 and invite you to contribute to our discussions of these vital issues. Articles on other topics will be included as space permits. Book reviews on relevant books are always welcome.

I am also in urgent need of assistance from people who can help edit the contributions and assist with typesetting of **Seedbed** and its online development. Please contact me about how you would like to contribute to **Seedbed**.

Don Little, Editor
(editor.seedbed@wornet.org)

THEMES FOR 2009 - 2010

Volume	Primary Theme	Related Themes & Topics
2009 - 1	Discipling BMBs: In both Arab world & diaspora contexts	• Persecution & suffering • Spiritual warfare • Spiritual formation
2009 - 2	Church Planting: Roles, strategies & fruitfulness	• Teams & international teams in CP • Relational dynamics • Third-culture kids issues
2009 - 3	Islamism & Violence: Impact on ministry and our ministry contexts	• Ethical & security issues • Trust in the AW • Boldness & caution
2010 - 1	Globalisation & its impact on ministry: Doing mission when the world is flat	• Ministering with Global South partners in AW • Diaspora ministry • Islam in the West
2010 - 2	Israel & Palestine: Theological & missiological issues	• Peace & Reconciliation • Interfaith dialogue • Cultural variations in AW
2010 - 3	Church & Agency: Changing relations in the 21 st century	• Prayer in ministry • Church-based teams • The emerging church in CP in the AW

Ministering through Arabic . . . Is it necessary or even possible?

It is said that the Arab world is the heart of the Muslim world. Those of us actually living in the Arab world, though we are not sure that it is the *centre* of the Muslim world, sometimes feel that it is one of the *hardest* places in the Muslim world. And one of the main challenges is the need to learn and minister in Arabic, the 'language of paradise.'

This issue of *Seedbed* answers some of the practical and ministry questions that we ask as we bring the love of God in Christ to the *Arabic-speaking* peoples of this region, *in Arabic*.

- Since so many locals speak English here in the Gulf, do we really need to learn Arabic in order to be effective in church planting?
- OK, I've finished language school; what do I do now to keep improving in Arabic?
- What do I need to do to get past the threshold I am now at in Arabic?
- How did you get so fluent in Arabic?
- Do I need to have Arabic to minister to Muslims here in the UK?
- What is the difference between the main Arabic translations of the Bible?
- How much does a Muslim understand when he or she picks up an Arabic Bible and reads it?
- I've just begun discipling an uneducated new believer. Which Arabic translation can I use that she will be able to understand?
- What do you think of the new contextualized translation of the Gospels and Acts? I've heard that we shouldn't trust it. Is that just a rumour, or are we really best to avoid it?

This *Seedbed* offers a wealth of good advice, insightful reflection and research into these questions and more.

Ahlan wa Sahlan!